

Arab Monetary Fund deposits \$50 million in Central Bank

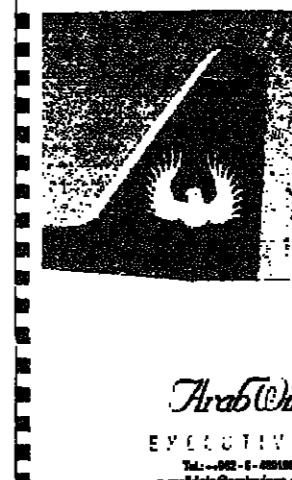
AMMAN (Petra) — The Arab Monetary Fund (AMF) Sunday deposited \$50 million in the Central Bank of Jordan (CBJ) and its Programme on Financing Inter-Arab Trade offered Jordan \$50 million in credit facilities to help finance trade exchanges with the other Arab countries. An agreement signed by CBJ Governor Ziyad Fariz and AMF Board Chairman Jassim Mana'i said the \$50 million in credit facilities can be used by Jordan within 12 months in its trade exchanges with Arab states, while the \$50 million deposit has been placed in the CBJ in order to enhance and help stabilise the Kingdom's national currency by increasing its foreign currency reserves. In a press statement following the signing of the agreement, Mana'i said the agreement is part of the AMF's drive to encourage trade exchanges among Arab states and contribute to Arab economic integration.

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King, former U.S. ambassadors discuss peace process, economy

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Abdullah said Sunday that Jordan will remain committed to the late King Hussein's foreign and domestic policies, stressing that the Kingdom will continue efforts to arrive at a comprehensive peace for all peoples in the region.

Speaking at a meeting with former U.S. ambassadors Roscoe Suddarth and Richard Murphy at the Royal court, King Abdullah said Jordan considers peace the best guarantee for the region in the near and distant future.

But the King noted that peace requires the combined efforts of all nations in the region and the world.

In his meeting with Suddarth, who is president of the Middle East Institute, and Murphy, a senior fellow at the Institute, King Abdullah spoke about the difficulties and challenges facing the development process in Jordan.

The King said Jordan is

placing economic reform on the top of its priorities to address problems facing the Jordanian people under the current difficult circumstances.

He also underlined Jordan's determination to work for the creation of an investment climate to attract investors from Arab and foreign countries.

Also Sunday, King Abdullah met with a delegation representing American friends of the Israeli Meretz Party for talks on the peace process and the obstacles facing the Palestinian-Israeli track.

Calling for consolidated efforts to overcome the difficulties, the King stressed the need for all concerned parties to honour their commitments so that a durable peace can be guaranteed.

King Abdullah stressed that the requirements of peace should override the requirements of national elections.

The King also met Peter Gubser, president of the American Near East

charitable organisation for AMF assistance.

King, Mubarak meet today

CAIRO (Petra) — His Majesty King Abdullah and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak today will hold a meeting in Taba to discuss recent developments in the peace process and bilateral relations, Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa said. Musa added that King Abdullah and Mubarak will also inaugurate a project linking the electricity grids of Jordan and Egypt.

Refugee Aid (ANERA) institution, and discussed the question of Palestinian refugees, their status and the burden shouldered by Jordan in accommodating the largest number of refugees.

King Abdullah called for intensive international efforts to help the refugees realise their rights to compensation and repatriation in accordance with U.N. resolutions.

King Abdullah also met with the visiting chairman of the Arab Monetary Fund, Jassim Mana'i. The King expressed Jordan's appreciation for AMF assistance.

which is principally concerned with the long-term development needs of Palestinians and Lebanese.

ANERA assists grassroots organisations to provide their communities with crucial health and community services in addition to increasing employment and educational opportunities for deprived groups.

The institution helps provide basic necessities of life to people adversely affected by war and conflict.

King Abdullah also met with the visiting chairman of the Arab Monetary Fund, Jassim Mana'i. The King expressed Jordan's appreciation for AMF assistance.



His Majesty King Abdullah meets Sunday with a child injured in a fire at a kindergarten in the northern part of the country (Photo by Yousef 'Allan)

King visits children injured in school fire

AMMAN (J.T.) — His Majesty King Abdullah and HRH Princess Rania on Sunday visited children who were injured in a fire at a kindergarten yesterday and ordered that the best possible care be accorded to them.

A total of 27 children from the Jaafar-Tayyar kindergarten in the town of Mughayer in Irbid governorate suffered first and second degree burns after a

kerosene heater that was accidentally overturned by one of the children set fire to the room, according to the children's teacher.

King Abdullah, who was also accompanied by Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh, Royal Court Chief Abdul Karim Kabari, Interior Minister Nayef Qadi, Health Minister Ishaq Maraqqa and the governor of Irbid, met with the children at Princess Basma Hospital

and received information about their condition from staff doctors.

The King issued directives that the best possible treatment be accorded to the children.

King Abdullah and Princess Rania spoke with the injured children and their parents and heard from them about the level of service at the hospital.

Hospital doctors told Jordan Television that most of

the children were discharged after receiving treatment. They said eight children suffering from burns to the face and hands remained in hospital.

Doctors said they expected all children to be discharged within a few days.

Qadi urged the Ministry of Education and other concerned authorities to ensure that teachers take extra precautions to prevent similar incidents.

Jordan 'strongly' rejects Israeli plan to reduce water supplies

By Ahmad Khatib

AMMAN — Jordan on Sunday "strongly" rejected an Israeli request to cut 60 per cent of this year's water supplies to the Kingdom promised under the 1994 peace treaty in order to fend off a drought in the Jewish state.

The official added that during a meeting in Jerusalem, the Jordanian delegation dismissed the Israeli argument and demanded full implementation of the peace deal "to secure the Kingdom's rightful water share."

According to Annex II of the peace treaty, Israel extracts 12 million cubic metres (mcm) of water from the Yarmouk River in summer — May 15 to Oct. 15 of each year — and Jordan extracts the rest of the river's flow.

In line with the treaty, the two countries last year began construction of a JD1.65 million diversion dam to more effectively utilise 40mcm of the Yarmouk's overflow per year and regulate year-round inflow of water to the 110-kilometre-long King Abdullah Canal.

Also in accordance with the treaty, the Kingdom is currently storing winter water in Lake Tiberias

to transfer 20mcm to the Kingdom from the Jordan River directly upstream from Deganya gates on the river in summer.

In winter — Oct. 16 to May 14 — Israel pumps out 13mcm and Jordan allows Israel to pump an additional 20mcm from the river. In return for the additional water that Jordan grants to Israel in winter, Israel agrees

to cope with a regional drought, saying that the Kingdom requested a temporary shutdown to guarantee a saving of its own supplies.

Israel assured Jordan months ago that it was committed to the peace treaty, refuting earlier statements by its Agriculture Minister Rafael Eitan that it should reconsider the water agreement signed with the Kingdom.

"Israel will stand by all its commitments in the peace accord with Jordan and shall continue cooperation with the Kingdom on various issues, including water, as outlined in the agreement between the two countries," Israeli Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon said then in an official clarification after Jordan protested Eitan's statement.

Poll finds public opinion against unity with PNA before Palestinian independence

By Saad G. Haffar

AMMAN — Most Jordanians are opposed to the prospects of either a confederation or federation with the Palestine National Authority before the creation of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, according to a poll carried out by a local newspaper.

The poll, published by the Arabic daily Al Arab Al Yawm, found that 58.9 per cent of the sample were against any Jordanian-Palestinian unity before the creation of a Palestinian state.

Political circles in Amman do not see eye-to-eye with the PNA leadership on the proposed confederation.

"There is a consensus that

the Jordanian-Palestinian bond is quite unique and stronger than all theoretical formulae... but there is also a consensus that the timing for this project is not ripe yet," said Senator Marwan Durdin.

"Any talk of unity should not be discussed before the Palestinians secure their right on their soil including an independent Palestinian state."

Durdin, a former minister for occupied territories affairs, told the Jordan Times in 1993, barely two years after the unity between the West Bank and Jordan, the strongest and longest in the Arab World.

King Hussein assumed his constitutional powers in 1953, following the peace accord with Jordan in 1948, and the Jordanian delegation dismissed the Israeli argument and demanded full implementation of the peace deal "to secure the Kingdom's rightful water share."

In 1967, the West Bank — including east Jerusalem — was occupied by Israel in a war the King never sought.

PNA leader Yasser Arafat rekindled the issue when he

(Continued on page 2)

Israel rejects any concessions on status of occupied Jerusalem

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — Israel's government adopted a resolution Sunday vowing never to cede any of Arab east Jerusalem to the PLO office in the Arab eastern sector of Jerusalem.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders responded furiously to the EU message, which Sunday's cabinet resolution said was "false in fact and from a legal standpoint and is totally unacceptable."

Israel occupied east Jerusalem in the 1967 Middle East war and illegally annexed the sector, now home to some 200,000 Palestinians and 160,000 Israelis.

The Israeli parliament in 1980 proclaimed all of Jerusalem the "eternal and indivisible capital of Israel" in a move never recognised by the international community.

Palestinians want to make Arab east Jerusalem the capital

of a future state and Israel agreed under the Oslo interim peace accords to negotiate the final status of the city.

But Netanyahu told his cabinet Sunday that "Jerusalem is not negotiable."

"Any attempt to undermine the sovereignty of the city will prompt an immediate and firm response," he said, according to an official account of the meeting.

Netanyahu has decided in light of the EU letter to make the issue of Jerusalem a central theme of his campaign for general elections in May, even though his main rivals espouse the same position that Israel should never cede sovereignty over the city.

Netanyahu's Likud Party unveiled new campaign slogans last week implying that the opposition Labour Party would give control over east

Jerusalem to the Palestinians. Labour Party leader Ehud Barak fired back by attacking Sunday's cabinet resolution as a campaign gimmick.

"Instead of wasting time on television appearances on issues that Israel is united about, the time has come for Netanyahu to present the cabinet with decisions that will solve the real problems facing Israel," he said in a statement.

Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon, meanwhile, ordered Israel's embassies and missions abroad to launch a global public relations campaign about Jerusalem.

The premier's office said the campaign would also "mobilise the Jewish communities and friends of Israel around the world to explain our stance."

Under a 1947 U.N. partition plan for Palestine which led to

Israel's creation, Jerusalem was to have been an international city separate from the Jewish state.

Israel, however, made west Jerusalem its capital in 1948 after Arabs rejected the U.N. plan.

The international community has never recognised that decision or the subsequent annexation of east Jerusalem.

Israeli politicians from both the governing and opposition camps have endorsed a compromise formula in which the Palestinians would be able to establish their capital, Al Quds, in an Arab suburb adjacent to annexed east Jerusalem.

Under the formula, reportedly backed by some senior Palestinian officials, an international corridor would link the Palestinian capital to Muslim holy sites inside east Jerusalem's Old City.

international conference of city governments in a west Jerusalem hotel.

The fifth annual Educating Cities Conference brought representatives from 150 towns and cities in 30 countries to Jerusalem for three days of discussions on the theme "Taking Heritage into the Future."

A statement issued by the strike organisers in east Jerusalem charged that Israeli authorities had no right to host the conference in a city where Palestinian culture and institutions were under attack.

"Holding this conference in Jerusalem is an attempt to falsify history and the cultural heritage" of Jerusalem, it said.

King meets with JPA today

By Amy Henderson

AMMAN — The Jordan Press Association is scheduled to meet with His Majesty King Abdullah today, signalling that a renewed dialogue on the country's Press and Publications Law is picking up momentum.

JPA President Seif Sherif said the meeting's agenda is an "open one, but we hope that we will have a chance to convey our concerns not only about the press law, but about all issues that concern our profession."

The meeting follows an appointment yesterday between the JPA and Royal Court Chief Abdul Karim Kabari and another meeting the previous day between the JPA and Prime Minister Nasser Lawzi, all known critics of the 1998 press law — to key Cabinet posts.

But they said they feared that the press law would have to take a back seat to more pressing issues, such as the economy, unemployment and this year's looming drought, all of which ranked high on the agenda in King Abdullah's letter of designation.

The JPA has been the first of the country's 13 professional associations invited to meet senior officials, and Sherif said the JPA and the media have been pleasantly surprised by the interest so far shown in the press.

"We will be the first association to meet His Majesty. We find it a positive sign that we are able to engage in constructive dialogue at the highest levels, and we are very encouraged by this signal," he said. "We are looking forward to seeing how King Abdullah views things."

(Continued on page 2)



HER MAJESTY Queen Noor Sunday received U.S. ambassadors Roscoe Suddarth and Richard Murphy at Bab Al Salam Palace. Ambassador Suddarth, president of the Middle East Institute, and Ambassador Murphy, a senior fellow for the Middle East at the institute, paid their respects to the Queen and expressed their deep sorrow over the death of His Majesty the late King Hussein. Ambassador Suddarth served as ambassador to Jordan from 1987-1990, while Ambassador Murphy was the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs from 1983-1989. U.S. Ambassador William Burns attended the meeting. Later, ambassadors Suddarth and Murphy held a tribute to King Hussein at the American embassy, entitled, "Remembering King Hussein: A Retrospective of Jordanian-American Relations."

JTC to issue new tender for school Internet project

By Ghadeer Taher

AMMAN — The Jordan Telecommunications Corporation (JTC) is preparing terms of reference to issue a tender to connect public schools to the Internet reversing a decision to award the multi-million dollar contract to an American company, said Telecommunications Minister Jamal Saraireh Sunday.

The JTC and its consultants are preparing the terms of reference so we can issue an open tender in line with the Audit Bureau's guidelines... The documents should be prepared within two weeks," said the minister, who was faced with two key resignations in the telecommunications sector almost immediately after taking office.

The government last week accepted the resignation of Jordan Telecommunications Company Chairman Ali Shukri, who accused Saraireh of interference in the JTC's affairs. In his resignation letter, Shukri said the minister had ordered the JTC to suspend the Internet project, a charge denied by Saraireh.

Almost immediately after Shukri stepped down, Yousef

Abu Jamous, director general of the Telecommunications Regulatory Commission (TRC) submitted his resignation over policy differences with the minister. The TRC official could not be reached for comment Sunday.

JTC's board of directors had decided to award the Internet project to the American firm Ascend for \$10 million without going through proper Audit Bureau guidelines for awarding contracts, said an official requesting anonymity.

But a senior JTC official told the Jordan Times yesterday that "while the final decision to award the contract has not been made, Ascend had the best offer, scoring the highest in the technical and financial evaluations."

He said Ascend had given a 35 per cent discount on the original offer bringing the price down to \$6.5 million with a five to seven-year repayment plan with interest at London Inter Bank Offered Rate (LIBOR) plus 1.75 per cent.

Four international companies submitted offers when the tender was issued several months ago, but some industry experts questioned the method in which the contract was awarded.

"Ascend scored 94.6 per cent out of 100 in the financial and technical combined (with the other offers by Nortel 90.3 per cent, NCR Corporation 84.9 per cent and Siemens with 64.9 per cent," said the JTC official.

Telechoice of the U.S. and Omnitel of Finland acted as consultants on the tender.

The late King Hussein, in a letter praising the JTC's achievements, directed that the country's public schools be connected to the Internet and that a nationwide mobile service network be launched.

The government official said the Cabinet will also review a tender issued by the state-owned JTC last month for a mobile phone service network. Five international firms submitted offers to set up and provide equipment for the Global System Mobile (GSM) project.

Saraireh refused to comment Sunday on Abu Jamous' resignation. However, in Sunday's Al Arab Al Yawm newspaper, the minister said the TRC director general did not resign. In the same article Abu Jamous confirmed reports of his resignation saying he had "sharp differences" with Saraireh.

Belgian beauties return home

By Rana Awwad

AMMAN — Twenty Belgian models, including Miss Belgium 1998, returned home on Saturday after spending nine days in Jordan to shoot video clips in preparation for their country's 1999 beauty title.

Their trip is expected to boost Jordan's tourism industry ahead of the Millennium by drawing Europe's attention.

The models were accompanied by two TV stations, 15 journalists, cameramen, producers, directors and personal assistants while "striking a pose" at Jordan's key natural, historic and archaeological sites.

The videos, depicting Jordan's Roman Amphitheatre, the Dead Sea, the Greco-Roman city of Jerash, Ajloun,

the Nabatean-built city of Petra, Madaba, Wadi Rum, the Ma'in Spa and the Red Sea resort of Aqaba, will be screened during the Miss Belgium 1999 contest on March 26.

"Jordan is the first country in the Middle East to be chosen for this kind of event," said Ziad Dakkak, managing director of Dakkak Tours and Travel Agency which coordinated the models' trip to Jordan.

"We have been working on this project for more than a year. We first invited the Miss Belgium 1998 Committee to the Kingdom while it was searching for a new destination for this year's video clip shooting," he told the Jordan Times in an interview.

"We hosted the event in cooperation with the Ministry of Tourism, Jordan Tourism Board, the Movenpick Hotel, Taybet Zaman and JETT," said Dakkak.

The contest will be broadcast live throughout Europe. The first 30 minutes will show a short documentary on Jordan's tourist attractions, a move officials hope will swell the number of European guests to Jordan.

"The documentary will also talk about the achievements of the late King Hussein and will talk about His Majesty King Abdullah," said Dakkak.

"The fact that Jordan was selected among all other countries as the location to shoot the clips means will have a positive impact on promoting Jordan's tourism industry ahead of celebrations to mark the start of the third Millennium," he said.

He took up his post in April 1995.

The South African experience was always of particular interest to Jordanian officials, politicians and analysts. As a member of the African National Council and a close personal friend of Mandela, and having been jailed, tossed into exile where he received military training, and returned to his native land to fight for

the rights of all the peoples of his country, De Bruyn provided concerned parties in Jordan with in-depth, first-hand experience into South Africa's ending of apartheid and move towards democracy.

His wife, Sophia T. Williams De Bruyn, who returned to Amman to arrange the diplomatic couple's return to home base, leaves Jordan today, after saying farewell to the embassy staff, Jordanian officials and the diplomatic corps.

Henry De Bruyn was South Africa's first ambassador to Jordan after the two countries established full diplomatic ties following the democratic election of Nelson Mandela as president of the republic in 1994.

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the rights of all the peoples of his country, De Bruyn provided concerned parties in Jordan with in-depth, first-hand experience into South Africa's ending of apartheid and move towards democracy.

Also during his tenure, De Bruyn sought to encourage bilateral commercial and tourism interests. Several delegations paid official visits to his country, and tourist groups from Jordan to South Africa began to witness an increase.

Yesterday, members of the Diplomatic Spouses' Club of Jordan along with Jordanian and expatriate associates and friends, gathered at the home of Liesbeth Tangelder, wife of Netherlands Ambassador to Jordan Bernard Tangelder, to say farewell to the De Bruyns.

The De Bruyns were scheduled to end their tour of duty in Jordan next month.

A new ambassador is expected to be named soon.

Meanwhile the embassy is being overseen by Chargé d'Affaires Schoeman du Plessis.

Camp residents welcome better living conditions under new government plan

'Only a few, who live outside the camps and try to politicise the issue, are questioning the improvement'

By Dana Charkasi

IRBID — Impoverished residents of two Palestinian refugee camps in northern Jordan say they are looking forward to improvements in services under a 10-year Social Productivity Programme (SPP) planned by the government.

The plan, launched in 1998, will try to improve the living standards of Jordanians, including Palestinian refugees in a country where one in every five citizens lives below the poverty line.

The Department of Palestinian Affairs (DPA), which looks after 13 camps housing Palestinian refugees and displaced Palestinians from the 1948 and 1967 wars with Israel, has promised to implement infrastructure projects worth JD3 million in the Martyr Azmi Al-Mutfi and Irbid camps in northern Jordan over the next three years.

"We don't see anything of these improvements," Zeina Jabbas, a resident of the Mutfi camp told the Jordan Times during a tour of camps sponsored by the DPA.

A local police officer was taking notes of the journalists' names and questions to officials and residents of the camp.

"We expect that the system to be finished after 14 months," he told reporters, showing them design papers.

In the first three years of the SPP, money will be spent on infrastructure projects across Jordan and in the last seven years on social schemes to ease the impact of poverty and unemployment.

The plan has been criticised by many refugees who fear it will lead to their permanent settlement in Jordan if they ever win their right to return to homes they left in 1948 in what is now Israel proper.

But DPA officials have rejected such claims.

coozes away in unpaved, sandy spots.

Nidal Haddad, director of the regional office of the DPA in Irbid governorate, said the department will spend JD1.8 million on building a sewage network in the Mutfi camp.

"Rats are running around. Yesterday I found one behind the door of our sleeping room," she added, pointing to open sewage system next to the house's main entrance.

"Once I got bitten by a rat."

The Mutfi camp is one of three camps lacking a proper sewage system. There, wastewater drains off via simple pipes from inside the resident's shabby homes to an open cement gully in the middle of walking paths where children play near the smelly stream of waste water.

In some areas, wastewater, draining off a sudden ending gully,

improvements to the Palestinian camps are not part of a nationalisation plan, but a responsibility Jordan undertakes towards refugees who enjoy full citizenship rights," DPA Director General Ibrahim Badran told reporters prior to the tour, designed to draw public attention to the department's role.

Jordan home to 1.5 million UN-registered refugees — around 42 per cent of all Palestinian refugees — spends around JD350 million a year on the camps each year, Badran added.

Only 18 per cent of the refugee population live in camps. The rest have moved out to nearby cities and towns.

Like elsewhere in Jordan, unemployment — officially estimated at 16 per cent and unofficially at up to 27 per cent — is a chronic problem for camp dwellers.

"When the Gulf countries were

ing the ordinary session.

"The peace treaty [with Israel] creates relations between two states but never make us abandon our history and faith," the prime minister told lawmakers.

"We will never allow a treaty to change our tradition and faith."

Rawabdeh was responding to a question from Deputy Abdul Razak Nsour who demanded a clarification from the government about speculations that the Ministry of Education was planning to rewrite textbooks, removing certain verses from the Quran that lash out at the Jews.

"Jordanian citizens will not accept that anyone tampers with our faith and history despite that

we have approved the peace treaty," Nsour, a pro-government deputy, said.

In the past few weeks, local newspapers have repeatedly published reports about government plans to remove verses attacking Jews from the school curriculum in line with the peace treaty signed between Jordan and Israel in October 1994. The treaty requires each country to refrain from propagating or inciting against the other.

Rawabdeh also told deputies the introduction of a two-day weekend is not among his government's priorities and said talks will be held with the banking sector to overcome differences resulting from the imple-

mentation of the new weekend scheme in the financial sector.

A fracas erupted following the Central Bank of Jordan's instructions to banks to implement a five-day work week and two-day weekend (Friday and Saturday). Bank employees have criticised the new scheme because it increases working hours by three additional hours a week to compensate for the additional day off.

Bank employees, especially women and those living outside the capital, complain that the new instructions will create familial problems because they will arrive home late.

In another development, Information Minister Nasser

Lawzi said that the government will submit its policy statement on April 3 following the Royal Decree to extend the Parliament's current ordinary session to enable the MPs to discuss the vote of confidence on Rawabdeh's government.

Lawzi said the government will submit its policy statement to Parliament on April 3. The confidence vote is scheduled for April 10. According to the Constitution, the government should submit its policy statement within 30 days of its formation.

The current Parliament session ends on March 27. The minister said the session will be extended by Royal Decree to April 15.

PM refutes speculations about altering school texts

By Tareq Ayyoub

AMMAN — Parliament on Sunday debated political, economic and social issues during its ordinary session which was attended by Prime Minister Abdur-Rauf S. Rawabdeh.

During the session, Rawabdeh refuted speculations about the government's intention to remove verses of the Holy Quran that criticise Jews from the curriculum of government schools and described such statements as "baseless."

"No verse will be removed from the curriculum, and anybody who commits such thing is a faithless apostate," Rawabdeh told the 80-member House dur-

ing the ordinary session.

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Environment ministry to sign agreement to clean up environmental hazard in Ruseifeh

By Ahmad Khatib

AMMAN — The government today will sign a JD972,000 agreement with a local company as part of a long-awaited effort to solve environmental dangers posed by a cesspit near Ruseifeh, known to be highly contaminated with industrial and domestic wastewater.

The Ministry of Municipal and Rural Affairs and the Environment will sign the deal with the company, which recently won the project tender to develop and treat the pit, commonly known as the "Pepsi pool." The cesspit sits in the heart of a populated and industrialised area east of Ruseifeh.

Residents have long complained of foul smells emanating from the site and of the spread of community diseases because of the pit's low hygiene standard. They said both adults and children have drowned while attempting to swim in the pool.

"Although it [the pool] is not too deep, two friends drowned in there last year as the slime strongly dragged down, and they could not make it out," Ibrahim Abu Ras, a Ruseifeh resident, told the Jordan Times.

Director General of the Ministry of Public Works' Tenders Department Nasser Madhah said

areas have created a dangerous situation, environmentalists and officials say.

During winter, rainfall often causes the pit to overflow into the surrounding residential area, posing an environmental hazard to citizens and workers, the added.

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Afghan foes agree to share power

ASHGABAT (R) — Afghanistan's warring factions agreed Sunday after three days of U.N.-mediated talks to share power and work to hammer out a permanent ceasefire.

Representatives of the ruling Islamic Taliban militia and the opposition coalition based in northern Afghanistan told a joint news briefing in the Turkmen capital Ashgabat they would meet again in Afghanistan to thrash out the details.

"In order to join both the groups, we have agreed to have a shared executive, a shared legislation and a shared judiciary," Wakil Ahmed Muttawakil, leader of the three-man delegation from the purist Islamic Taliban, announced through an interpreter.

The agreement, reached after intense, secret talks which often lasted well into the night, also called for the exchange of 20 prisoners each.

Despite the broad nature of a statement released, both sides were optimistic.

"I am optimistic and hopeful that at the next round of talks we will be able to announce a permanent ceasefire in Afghanistan," said Mohammad Younus Qanouni, a senior opposition figure and head of their four-man group, through a translator.

He said that the atmosphere of trust and confidence established at the secluded botanical gardens complex where the negotia-

tions took place had led him to believe that a joint government and an end to hostilities were within reach.

Muttawakil was also upbeat, saying a permanent ceasefire would automatically follow any establishment of a shared power structure.

"When we agree on the details and personnel of the government, then we can agree to have a ceasefire," he said.

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are the only countries to recognise the Taliban government, which controls more than 90 per cent of Afghan territory. Islamabad was quick to hail the agreement.

While representing a significant step towards ending years of bloodshed, the Ashgabat accord is only the start of what promises to be a delicate process.

As if to underline the fragility of the situation in war-torn Afghanistan, the Taliban delegation confirmed that there had been some preparations for further military offensives, but that they were "not that considerable."

U.N. sources confirmed that there had been "low-level fighting" between the sides during the talks, a fact both delegations recognised.

But the acting head of the United Nations Special Mission to Afghanistan (UNSMIA), Andrew Tisseri, said that in spite of the work ahead, there was clearly cause for hope.

In summing up the talks, he said: "These talks we sincerely hope mark a watershed, because they address not only confidence-building measures, but also fundamental issues regarding the future of Afghanistan."

Qanouni said autonomy for some ethnic groups within Afghanistan was not currently on the agenda.

Qanouni said: "We have had talks and negotiations in the past. This is the first time we have been able to create an atmosphere of trust and take a step towards a political solution to the Afghan crisis."

Gunmen abduct Sri Lankan journalist

COLOMBO (AFP) — Armed men abducted a Sri Lankan journalist responsible for exposing corruption in the military and pushed him out of a vehicle after beating him here Sunday, his colleagues said.

The gunmen had first cut the telephone lines to the home of Srilal Priyantha, the defence correspondent of the Sinhalese language weekly *The Lankbima* and abducted him in a four-wheel drive vehicle, the colleagues said.

"I believe he was attacked because of his writings exposing corruption in the defence establishment," Priyantha's editor, Bandula Padmakumara, told AFP. "The attack could be for any of his (recent) articles."

Priyantha's report of an alleged abduction and assault against a young couple by an army brigadier was the front-page headline story in Sunday's *Lankbima*, which usually is sold at newsstands a day earlier on Saturdays.

Editor Padmakumara was previously charged with criminally defaming President Chandrika Kumaratunga but was acquitted.

However, the government has appealed that

judgement and the appeal is expected to be heard on March 23, Padmakumara added.

He said he believed those mentioned in Priyantha's exposés may have been involved in Sunday's pre-dawn attack.

The gunmen had pushed Priyantha out of the vehicle after severely beating him and placing two plastic bags over his head in a bid to suffocate him, Padmakumara said.

The journalist was in shock and unable to speak with his colleagues as he was taken to Colombo hospital shortly after being found abandoned on a roadside.

The local media watchdog, the Free Media Movement (FMM), strongly condemned the attack and accused the government of creating an environment which compromised the safety of journalists.

"Senior government ministers led by President Chandrika Kumaratunga have launched a campaign of abuse against independent media organisations and selected independent journalists after the media exposed widespread rigging of votes in the provincial council elections in the north western province on Jan. 25," the FMM said.

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Pro-Serb demonstrators carry banners and flags as they take part in a protest over the resumption of the Kosovo peace talks, in front of the Palais de Chaillot on Paris' Trocadero. After the initial round of talks in Rambouillet ended with only a partial solution, Serb and ethnic Albanian delegations will return to Paris' Kleber Conference Centre next week for fresh talks (Reuters photo)

Kosovo peace talks to resume under gathering gloom

PARIS (R) — Kosovo peace talks resume in Paris Monday after bombs killed seven people in the province and Western states appeared less united than before last month's dead-end negotiations in Rambouillet.

Ethnic Albanians struggling for independence from Belgrade and Serbian delegates determined to block them were due to gather in an elegant conference centre for another round of arm's-length talks mediated by three foreign diplomats.

The first round of proximity talks adjourned after 17 days in an isolated chateau with the ethnic Albanian close to signing a peace accord but the Belgrade delegation firmly opposed to its plan to station outside peace-keeping forces in Kosovo.

Ethnic Albanians have since agreed to the plan, even if the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) has not yet officially declared whether it will accept its provisions for autonomy within Serbia rather than the independence it has fought for.

But Yugoslavia's strongman President Slobodan Milosevic again said "no" last week after an eight-hour arm-twisting session with U.S. Balkan troubleshooter Richard Holbrooke.

Gunmen also attacked the home of senior journalist Iqbal Attas but in that case several airforce personnel were arrested and now face criminal charges.

Unidentified attackers fired about 40 rounds with automatic assault rifles at Lasantha Wickrematunga, the chief editor of the Sunday Leader weekly.

In June last year, an editor of a newspaper highly critical of the government escaped death when gunmen burst into his home and sprayed it with bullets.

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The tourist helicopter

only encouraged those within and outside the government to use violence against journalists who exposed wrongdoing.

The FMM urged the government to investigate the latest attack but at the same time warned the authorities may not probe the case properly and "sweep it under the carpet" as in similar incidents in the past decade.

Police said they had already started an investigation.

Sunday's abduction and assault was the latest in a recent string of attacks against journalists critical of the government and the military.

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At least 2,000 people have died in the fighting in the past year.

The ethnic Albanian delegation landed in Paris

Saturday and their Serbian counterparts were due to arrive Sunday.

The three mediators — Christopher Hill of the United States, Russia's Boris Mayorsky and Austrian Wolfgang Petritsch for the European Union — planned to meet Sunday evening with contact group officials to work out a schedule for the talks.

The contact group sponsoring the "proximity talks," a formula chosen because the two delegations usually refuse to meet each other, includes the U.S., Russia, Germany, France, Britain and Italy.

Mediators and delegates, who were cloistered around the clock in the Rambouillet chateau last month, will sleep in Paris hotels during these talks and negotiate in the Kleber conference centre near the Arc de Triomphe.

The envoys said the talks were expected to last three or four days because the only real issue to discuss was whether Belgrade would accept 28,000 NATO-led peace-keeping troops.

The bloodshed picked up dramatically Saturday, when bomb blasts in two Kosovo towns killed at least seven people.

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World News

Street violence sweeps Basque country

MADRID, Spain (AP) — Enraged by the arrest of Basque separatist leaders, assailants hurled Molotov cocktails and set off a homemade explosive in the worst weekend of street violence since the armed group ETA declared a cease-fire six months ago, news reports said Sunday.

State radio reported 17 incidents across the Basque country of northern Spain. A spokesman for the regional police said four people were treated for smoke inhalation in San Sebastian and five were arrested for public disorder.

In Bilbao, a small explosive device went off overnight Saturday in the doorway of an apartment building where a socialist city councillor's parents live, but no one was hurt.

Assailants also threw Molotov cocktails through the front window of a Citroen dealership, damaging several cars.

In Pamplona, attackers set fire to a telephone booth, several trash bins and an automatic teller machine at a bank.

In the town of Bermeo, 10 hooded assailants armed with baseball bats stormed the local headquarters of the Socialist Party and smashed it up Saturday. Four people were inside at the time but no one was

injured.

The violence in these and other Basque towns followed Tuesday's arrest in Paris of an ETA member that Spanish police described as the leader of the group's commandos. Four other suspected ETA members were also arrested in Paris.

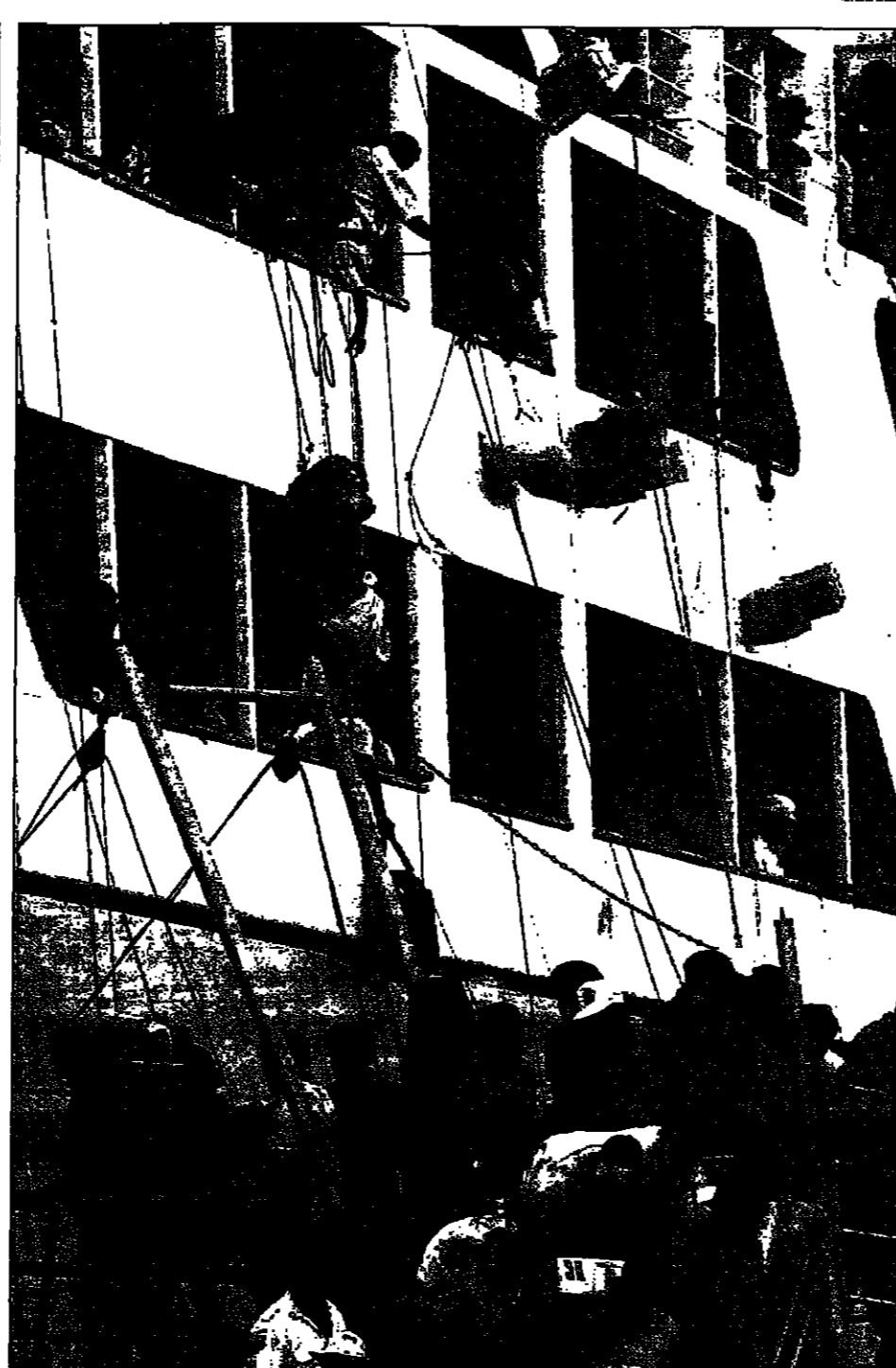
The next day police who had been monitoring two senior ETA operatives in San Sebastian arrested them when it appeared the two were preparing to flee Spain. Seven other ETA suspects were also taken into custody.

Spanish government officials have insisted these arrests do not jeopardise the peace process declared in September.

So-called low-level street violence by young supporters of ETA began several months ago as the peace process appeared to stall, with the government rejecting Basque demands for concessions ahead of negotiations on ending the 30-year conflict.

Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar has offered to hold talks with ETA, which stands for Basque Homeland and Freedom, but ruled out allowing Basque secession.

ETA's armed campaign for independence has claimed nearly 800 lives.



Indonesian refugees and migrants hoist their belongings into a ship departing Ambon. Thousands of local people have been fleeing from Ambon because of continuing fighting between Christians and Muslims (Reuters photo)

Exiled aide of Malaysia's Anwar returns

KUALA LUMPUR (R) — The political secretary to sacked Malaysian Finance Minister Anwar Ibrahim returned home Sunday after a six-month self-imposed exile.

Mohamed Ezam Mohd Noor, 31, who said Sunday he feared arrest upon his return to Malaysia, was instead greeted with shouts of "reformasi" (reform), the rallying cry of Anwar's supporters, at the airport.

Some 300 supporters and family members welcomed him at the airport on his arrival from Singapore, where he was in transit.

"From the information I gather, they may arrest me," Mohamed Ezam had told Reuters in Singapore ahead of his return.

He was driven to Anwar's house for a meeting with Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, the wife of the former cabinet minister. Anwar, remanded in prison, is currently on trial on corruption charges.

Mohamed Ezam left Malaysia for Indonesia's capital Jakarta on Sept. 29 when Anwar appeared in court with a black eye and other injuries that he sustained in police custody.

Just after the court appearance, Mohamed Ezam wrote an open letter, released on the Internet, denouncing police for the attacks on Anwar.

Mohamed Ezam's sources told him that the letter had automatically made him a target for police arrest, he said.

Anwar's sacking, arrest and subsequent injuries have stirred international and domestic indignation, which in September resulted in unprecedented anti-government protests.

On Feb. 28, former police chief Abdul Rahim Noor admitted to assaulting Anwar before a royal commission that was investigating Anwar's injuries.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has called Anwar morally unfit. But the former deputy prime minister says he is a victim of a high-level political conspiracy.

Anwar has been charged with five counts each of corruption and sodomy. He denies all charges against him.

Mohamed Ezam said after the meeting with wan Azizah that he was touched by the support shown by leaders and people in the region towards the reform movement.

"All of them have expressed support for Malaysians in their struggle for justice," he said in a statement.

His lawyer, Sivarasi Rasiah, said there were still prospects of Mohamed Ezam being arrested.

"But he is prepared to face it," he told reporters.

Resurgence of listeria worries U.S. authorities

WASHINGTON (AFP) — Contamination of hot dogs and cold cuts by a sometimes deadly bacterium has led to an "extraordinary series of recalls" and U.S. government action to detect and prevent it, the New York Times reported Sunday.

Listeria monocytogenes resurfaced in December, when 35 million pounds of hot dogs and processed luncheon meats were recalled following an outbreak of listeriosis.

Nearly 100 people in 22 states became ill, and 10 deaths were reported, the Times said on Feb. 17 the U.S. government ordered the recall of close to a

tonne of meat products distributed to Asian specialty stores that may have been contaminated with listeria.

So far this year the department of agriculture has announced eight listeria recalls; seven of processed meats and one of milk.

By comparison, the December recall was one of only three in 1998. Two were announced in 1997.

While no deaths have been linked to the 1999 recalls, the December outbreak "shook everyone up," said Dr. Kay Wachsmuth of the Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service.

"We can't tell at this point if there is a resurgence," Wachsmuth told the paper.

Part of the problem is the longer shelf-life of modern, ready-to-eat food products, the Times said.

Unlike many other disease-causing bacteria, listeria can thrive at refrigerator and freezer temperatures.

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Tension returns to Indonesia's spice island

AMBON, Indonesia (AFP) — Tension returned Sunday to the eastern Indonesian city of Ambon, scarred by weeks of sectarian violence, as the discovery of new corpses sparked fears of further unrest.

Ambo's streets, which

had hesitantly begun to return to life Saturday morning with shops and markets reopening and traffic resuming, were again deserted by noon Sunday.

"It is most likely that people are taking no risk, fearing renewed violence, since the discovery of the body in Galunggung yesterday," a local journalist said.

A Roman Catholic priest said parishioners had told him two bodies had been found in a ditch in the predominantly Muslim area of Galunggung Saturday.

Police said only one body had been found.

Heavy security has since been imposed in the city where Christian-Muslim violence since mid-January has left more than 200 dead and sparked an exodus of tens of thousands.

Earlier the city's Christian community quietly celebrated Sunday Mass in churches, many of them guarded by marines deployed since the military authorities took over from the police Thursday to try to restore order.

"We have had one platoon of marines guarding our church for the past two days and this has reassured our

people," said a man named Joseph at the Silo Protestant Church.

Another platoon had also been deployed by the military at the main Al-Fatah Muslim mosque, he added.

At the Ambon cathedral, seven marines were on guard as hundreds of Christians attended morning mass there.

Some soldiers also took part in services including one at the devastated Negeri Lima church, where 100 people solemnly met in the shell of the building which only has walls left standing.

The congregations did not linger after mass with most people immediately hurrying home, witnesses said.

The market place, busy with traders Saturday morning, was deserted Sunday and the only vehicles to be seen were either military or police cars, while the few private vehicles were mostly accompanied by soldiers.

At the military headquarters, soldiers were preparing a symbolic ceremony to burn a variety of weapons confiscated or surrendered by their owners after the authorities called for a civilian disarmament.

The head of the Maluku provincial military command, Colonel Karel Rahalu, was quoted by the Antara news agency as saying security forces were conducting raids and street checks to disarm civilians.

Several military road blocks were set up across

the city and on its outskirts, where soldiers frisked passers-by and car passengers, checking their vehicles for weapons.

A total of 37 people in Ambon were found Saturday carrying various weapons including cutlasses, knives, spears, arrows and petrol bombs.

Rahalu was speaking on the neighbouring island of Saparua Saturday as he accompanied a team of 19 native Moluccan officers on a tour to try to bring peace among the Christian and Muslim communities in Maluku province, famed for its chain of spice-growing islands.

"People should realize and halt their conflict because if there are those resisting (the military) they will be immobilized, and if necessary shot on sight in line with the procedures," he warned.

The military took command of riot control after the latest wave of violence hit central Ambon late Wednesday.

The head of the Maluku military police, Major Suhendi, told Antara mean-while his unit was investigating nine soldiers sus-pected of having violated procedures by shooting dead six people during Wednesday's riots.

Suhendi quoted witnesses as saying the soldiers had opened fire without warning.

Germany to set new priorities with Lafontaine gone

BONN (R) — German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder's top policy advisor said Sunday the government would change direction following the unexpected departure of left-leaning Finance Minister Oskar Lafontaine.

Chancellor's Minister Bodu Hornbach said that Schroeder, a moderate in his leftist party with close ties to industry, would redouble efforts to cut taxes and try to remove barriers that have hindered companies investing in Germany for years.

"I see the chance for a change in direction that will show the government is interested in policies that will be of benefit to the entire economy," Dieter Hundt, president of the BDA German employers association, told German radio.

"Industry will honour that," he said. "The previous policies had Lafontaine's signature all over them. We now have the chance for more modern economic policies which will then have a positive impact on the labour market."

The outspoken Lafontaine, who had been ridiculed in the media for his leftist tax-and-spend theories and ostracized in financial circles for his lonely cries for market regulation, has sought seclusion behind the gates of his Saarbruecken home near the French border.

In his only comments since quitting, Lafontaine Saturday briefly appeared before journalists who had been camping out on the street outside his house and said that he was trying to limit the fall-out

a private citizen now and wanted to be left alone.

Lafontaine submitted his resignation in writing and has refused to discuss any aspect of his bizarre departure. He has even hung up the phone on Schroeder, whom he had

long called a close friend and ally.

Schroeder, whose victory over Helmut Kohl in last September's election would not have been possible without Lafontaine's support, has declined any public comment

on Lafontaine's motives.

But the chancellor admitted in a remarkable box telephone interview he unwittingly gave to a Berlin radio reporter posing as German President Roman Herzog that Lafontaine refused to speak to him.

"I received his letter of resignation... and have not been able to talk with him because he does not want to talk with me," Schroeder told the reporter, who was imitating Herzog's voice.



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Change from within

HIS MAJESTY King Abdullah was very clear in his message Saturday to U.S. envoy Martin Indyk when he told the ranking U.S. official that the embargo on Iraq has become an intolerable burden on that country's people, that the U.N. imposed sanctions on Baghdad should be lifted and that "Jordan will never take any part in instituting any changes in Iraq." This strong Jordanian message is certainly timely amidst persistent reports that Washington is planning a large-scale decisive action in Iraq in its effort to remove that country's leadership and is busy soliciting Arab support for its plan.

Several Arab capitals have already voiced concerns about U.S. intentions. Doha's Emir Sheikh Hamad Ben Khalifa Al Thani called on the Washington to stop its daily aerial strikes against Iraqi targets. Egypt reiterated the same position Saturday when Foreign Minister Amr Musa called on the U.S. to stop the attacks. The United Arab Emirates had voiced a similar concern many months ago. The silent majority in the Arab World feel even stronger about the unilateral actions by the U.S. and Britain against the Arab country.

Whatever Washington and London have up their sleeves against Baghdad, any changes on the ruling regime in the country must come from within and not from outside the country, the Arab leaders told American envoys. As King Abdullah told Indyk, change in Iraq "is the concern of the Iraqi people alone." Translated to real terms, the Iraqi people must be provided with the real opportunity to exercise the right to self-determination by enjoying free and democratic elections. The call by the international community on Iraq to exercise pluralistic democracy is a legitimate cause as is the call on Iraq to meet its international treaty obligations.

Starving the Iraqi people, like the North Koreans or the Cubans have been starved for decades, is certainly not going to provide the right climate for change.

Meanwhile, the Iraqi people, sick and hungry, cannot possibly effect the change that they yearn for and that their neighbours would like them to carry out.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

Al Ra's Kheirallah Kheirallah said all indications are that the declaration of an independent Palestinian state will be postponed, to remove any possible pretext that could be used for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the run-up to the elections in May. Kheirallah quoted an American official in London as saying that a declaration before the Israeli elections will favour Netanyahu. The most important issue is to consider what will happen after elections, and certainly Palestinian President Yasser Arafat will not declare a state before May 17, said Kheirallah. However, Arafat has the right to refuse such a postponement unless there is some compensation; for example a U.S. pledge to push final status negotiations — a factor that will practically enable the Palestinians to declare their state within a reasonable period, he added. At a time when the U.S. is hesitating, Europe has already taken a "brave" step by considering Jerusalem a "special body," noted the writer. It is obvious that Palestinian flexibility is paying off, and ensures a declaration of an independent Palestinian state regardless of the date, Kheirallah concluded.

Al Dustour's Oreb Rintawi listed a number of U.S. and Israeli statements and decisions, which he described as "impudent and provocative." The U.S. Congress' decision to warn Palestinian President Yasser Arafat about declaring an independent state on May 4 is "extraordinarily so," and the voting on this decision is even worse (98 for and one against), Rintawi said. Extremists at the Israeli Knesset have suggested a similar idea, but did not reach the stage of voting, said Rintawi, but assuming that they manage to include this issue in their agenda, it will not get such support. The Israeli government, furthermore, has the "nerve" to request \$1.2 billion from U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen as a price for an agreement. Israel did not implement (the Wye Accords), said Rintawi. U.S. statements about Iraq are "extremely impudent," after they called the air attacks nothing but "self-defence," the U.S. administration also claimed that the "silent" war against Iraq is American "business" and has nothing to do with anyone else, including the U.N. Security Council, said the writer. According to these U.S. announcements, Rintawi said, Iraq is the "aggressor" and responsible for the continuing clashes. The writer concluded by saying that the most "impudent" incident last week is the "courageous" defiance by an Arab-Israeli of the Israeli fundamental movement of Chas, claiming it represents the Arab community and expresses its concerns, even though it bans Arabs from joining.

The year we become six billion

By Gwynne Dyer

IT IS the year of the six billion: on June 16, the world's human population will reach the astonishing total of 6,000,000,000, precisely double the figure in 1960. Japan is marking the event after a fashion, by finally legalising oral contraceptives. But China, with over a fifth of the world's people, has authorised a pilot programme that could result in ending the country's draconian "one-child-per-family" birth-control policy.

Disasters in the making? Not necessarily. Phasing out China's one-child policy now, for example, could avert a boom in the birth-rate if and when the country democratises. And legalising oral contraceptives is unlikely to affect the birth rate in Japan which is already one of the lowest in the world.

The impending end of Japan's 35-year ban on the Pill was triggered by female outrage at the government's rapid approval of Visgra. "The elderly men who rule Japan raced to approve a drug to enhance male sexuality," fumed Yuriko Ashino, deputy director of the Family Planning Federation of Japan, "but women have had to wait for decades for a drug that would improve the quality of their life." The Health Ministry is expected to recommend in June that oral contraceptives at last

become generally available on prescription.

But why weren't they legalised over 30 years ago, when they became commercially available in the rest of the developed world? The initial reasons were the chauvinism of Japanese males (who feared that the Pill would make women promiscuous), and a nationalist determination to let nothing hinder the rapid growth of Japan's population. The reason the ban has lasted so long, however, is the influence of the medical lobby representing the doctors who performed Japan's 350,000 annual abortions.

Abortion has become Japanese women's main way of dealing with unwanted pregnancies in a society without easy contraception, and they are hugely profitable for the doctors who do them. Their lobby made large, regular contribution to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, and the normal dynamics of Japanese politics did the rest.

But here's the point. Banning the pill did nothing to keep Japan's birth-rate up: women just had abortions instead. Indeed, Japan's birth rate has fallen so low that the over-65s outnumber the under-15s. The total population, now 125 million, will go into absolute decline only eight years from now.

So what drove Japanese women to stop having babies? A recent report written for the Ministry of

Health by Michiko Mukuno pulls no punches: it's the fact that "the Japanese corporate climate requires husbands to put work before family." In a society where "salarymen" have to show their loyalty to the company by working very long hours and then spending many evenings and holidays with colleagues or clients, there is just no time left for a normal family life.

Japanese women have responded by having fewer children, or by avoiding marriage entirely: the average age at marriage of Japanese females has been rising by four months annually throughout this decade. This had nothing to do with the contraceptive technologies available, or even with the general levels of health and economic security in the society. It was just that Japanese women have got fed up with having to raise their families effectively alone.

Modern population-control experts are finally coming to understand what should have been obvious all along: that people's motives, not technology or regulations, are key in deciding how many children they have. People have always known how to limit their numbers — even hunter-gatherers did it, though their method was often just exposing unwanted children — and they generally will choose to do so if

they can count on a reasonable level of prosperity and a good level of child health care. So since China has more or less achieved those levels, why does continue with the ruthless "one-child-per-family" policy?

When the policy was first imposed in 1979, the sheer pressure of people on China's limited land and resources was generally seen as excuse enough: births had to be forced far below normal levels to avert future calamity. China is still heading for 1.6 billion people in the next half-century, but without the "one-child" policy, some experts say, it would have been 300 million more. Other experts, however, wonder whether similar results might not have been achieved with much less coercion.

These were the years, after all, when decent health care and a measure of economic security were becoming normal in China: people's motivations about children would have been changing anyway. Besides, resistance to the coercive "one-child" policy has forced major retreats on the government. While it is fairly strictly enforced in the cities, in the countryside these days most families are allowed two children (especially if the first was a girl), so long as there is a five-year gap between them.

So it's really a one-point-eight child-per-family policy, not drasti-

Feature
Finnish
compl

cally different from what has been achieved elsewhere in Asia, and it will be blown away by popular resentment the moment that China moves to a less repressive system. Might it not be a good idea for China to move now to the kind of non-coercive approach that has been so successful in, for example, Indonesia, where the average number of children has dropped from 5.6 to 2.9 per woman in the past 25 years?

Starting next month, in 32 rural counties with a total population of 20 million, China will launch a pilot project that ends coercion and relies on making information and a wide variety of contraceptive means available to everybody. China-wide change may follow if loosening the controls does not lead to an instant population explosion in the test counties.

Six billion people on Spaceship Earth may already be too many, and the cruel irony about population control is that the most effective means of achieving it improving people's living standards also increases each individual's pressure on the environment. But the battle against overwhelming numbers is being won, and the good news is that the most efficient methods do not require repression.

The writer is a London-based independent journalist whose articles are published in 45 countries

Letters to the editor

Proper water policy may avert shortages

WHILE THE prospects for more rainfall at this time of the year are very slim, the scenario of a hot and waterless summer is very real and only a few months away. Amman's citizens quite vividly recall last summer's water nightmare, that resulted in an emergency situation, catching a helpless and unprepared government off guard, and unable to handle the situation with efficiency, while desperate citizens, most of whom developed a water scarcity phobia and had no choice but to drink polluted water, thanked God that there was any at all. Bearing in mind all these unpleasant memories, certainly none of us is eager to go through the same painful experience. Allow me to point out that securing fresh, potable water to its citizens is the sole obligation of the government and not an individual's responsibility. We as citizens, on the other hand, are sharing this responsibility towards the community by having learnt how to cope with water shortages by minimising water usage during summer. However, miracles cannot be expected when it comes to technical issues and when there is no running water in the taps for weeks in a row.

Furthermore, there is no need to constantly condole Jordanian tax-payers that similar water crisis take place all around the world, even in the most advanced Western countries. Such comparisons cannot but be viewed as totally baseless, first of all because those countries are rich in water resources to start with. Secondly, if a water situation should arise due to heavy rainfalls or floods, those countries are fully prepared both financially and technically to deal with disasters in contrast to Jordan, a country with limited resources.

The current government has solemnly pledged that water issues will be topping its agenda of priorities. Hopefully, the concerned authorities have also learnt from past mistakes and will not allow their recurrence. With the few months left before the summer sets in fully, this government still has time to adopt strong and effective measures to effect regular and equal water supply to all residents in the various parts of the Kingdom, and to secure a smooth flow of local and imported fresh bottled water at acceptable prices, to put under control any attempts at illegal water profiteering. They must also speedily implement important water projects that have been given financial aid by foreign countries. If all this is done with a great sense of obligation, there will be enough water for everybody.

Rumiana M. Nuseibeh
Amman

SPANA will not abandon J.S.P.A.

MAY I correct a couple of errors in your article about the Jordanian Society for the Protection of Animals ("Animal Protection Society faces financial straits", JT, March 9)?

Firstly, neither SPANA nor the J.S.P.A. works with the tourist horses in Petra; and secondly, and most importantly, SPANA has no plans to abandon the J.S.P.A. and its vital role of working with the animals of poor people. That task is enormous, and although it can never be enough, SPANA in 1999 will be spending more money in Jordan than ever before!

Jeremy Hulme
Chief Executive
SPANA

Letter of condolence

HIS MAJESTY King Hussein was a rare jewel on this earth. Most of us live ordinary lives, enveloped by personal problems and the pressures of daily living, never realising how minute our problems are in comparison to those a king carries upon his shoulders.

King Hussein carried the weight of the world upon his shoulders, and did so with greatness, grace and elegance. He was a man of God, and did the works of God, bringing peace to person after person; heart after heart; nation after nation.

May God bless him — the peace-maker — and his son, His Majesty King Abdullah, who I believe will be the new jewel of the Middle East. Jordan, you should be very proud.

Deborah Arslan
U.S.

A free, sceptical, impudent media should form the spine of Europe

By Rob T. Herich

IMAGINE THAT while Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister her son had taken his own life. Do you suppose it would have been possible to impose a news blackout on the story in Britain? Might the press, radio and television have opted, as a matter of taste, for a self-imposed ban? Before you dismiss the very idea as absurd, prepare to hear just such a story: a comparable case, in a mature European democracy with an uncensored press, not far from our shores. Their Prime Minister's son committed suicide.

The Prime Minister took two months' leave from leadership of her party to get over the tragedy; but remained Prime Minister. Everybody in the media knew about it. Nobody published. Nobody explained. The tragedy was simply not reported.

We are not talking about some fledgling Eastern European state, new to the ways of open press debate. The country is Norway. It was there a few weeks ago for a journalists' conference, and I was invited to talk about press attitudes to privacy in public life. My Norwegian counterparts were astonished at the impertinence of Anglo-Saxon newspapers and offered this story about their former Prime Minister as an example of the gulf between attitudes.

The politician concerned was Gro Harlem Brundtland. Her son died in the autumn of 1992. After her two-month break she returned to her party's leadership and remained Prime Minister until 1996. But not until last year, when Mrs Brundtland herself wrote about the affair in an autobiography, did the Norwegian media consider it acceptable to tell the public what had happened.

I wonder whether your reaction to this is like mine: torn. On the one hand there is a certain magnificence in the way an entire institution like the diverse and loosely-knit Norwegian media held the line. The temptation to publish this sensation must have been strong. One feels, too, some satisfaction that a private individual's feelings, at a time of huge personal difficulty, should have been so respected: a national courtesy perhaps absent here in Britain. It may be that the Norwegian people would approve of the way they were kept in the dark.

But it won't do, will it? How long has it been in Britain since it would have been possible to suppress such a story about a senior politician? A century? Two? The farces and tragedies of our monarchs' personal lives have seldom been out of bounds — the most famous exception, the abdication crisis, being widely considered an inglorious hour for the British press.

American journalism is much the same. Disproportionate or not, who here seriously thinks the allegations made against Bill Clinton should not have been reported? Contrast this with a poll published in France last year by *Elle* magazine. Eighty

three per cent of French readers felt the public had no right to know about the private life of their President. Yet now they rush to hear news of Monica Lewinsky. It is simply not true that ordinary people on the Continent are not interested in the secrets of the powerful — that they have (as snootier British commentators insinuate) "risen above" that kind of curiosity, being more grown-up than the British masses. In Spain, such stories, published in an irredeemably trashy magazine called *Leagues*, are devoured hungrily by ordinary Spaniards.

There is one reason alone why this sort of news never achieves a wider currency in France or Spain: mainstream editors won't print it. Broadcasters won't broadcast it. There exists on the Continent, to use a fashionable term, an institutional deference among respectable journalists towards the political class.

Assumed by politicians, it is accepted as the norm by journalists. And it is infectious. Even Britain's Sue MacGregor succumbed. She was interviewing Jacques Santer about alleged corruption among European commissioners. Or, rather, she thought she was. Santer was simply not playing. Asked about specific instances, he ignored her. He wouldn't even acknowledge a theoretical application of general rules (which he was happy to discuss) to particular individuals. He wouldn't talk about it at all.

Forgive me, but isn't this just a different world from ours? There is no space here to descend into Italian current affairs, where collusion between politicians and the media defies description: no time to explore the sense of responsibility many continental journalists seem to feel, not to destabilise the State in democracies that may not really work properly, and which are both nervous about World War II.

Not have I done justice to the Scandinavian scene, where inquiry into financial irregularity is as rigorous as its respect for different kinds of "personal" secret. Germany is different again: its press is now as salacious as ours about the spicy side of life, but a high-minded public-spiritedness creeps into media treatment of "important" policy stories, like currency union. No German politician would submit to a Paxman.

This matters profoundly.

Europe is moving towards serious democratic deficit in pan-European government, a gap unlikely to be filled by any Europe-wide elected assembly, and into which our parochial national legislatures are reluctant or unable to pry. Into that gap, only the news media seem equipped to go with any real persistence and method. A free, sceptical, impudent and vigorous press, from the Atlantic to the Urals, could form the spine of a sort of emerging European democracy: transnational in its spirit of inquiry.

But don't ask the Norwegians why their Prime Minister dropped out for two months. Don't ask President Chirac about his son-in-law's mysterious suicide. And don't ask Jacques Santer anything. In Britain and the United States it is, in theory, the

— The Times

Features

Jordan Times, Monday, March 15, 1999

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Finnish team identifies Byzantine monastic complex on Jabal Haroon at Petra — Part I

(NOTE: This is the first of two articles on the first excavation season of the Finnish Jabal Haroon Project, working on Aaron's Mountain at Petra. Part II appears next Monday.)

FOR THE past century, scholars have assumed that the earth-covered ancient structures near the summit of Jabal Haroon (Mount Aaron) in south Jordan were the remains of a Byzantine monastery and pilgrimage centre. Now, a Finnish team has completed its first full season of archaeological exploration in the area, and has confirmed the existence of a monastic complex with a large church and a smaller chapel which might have been dedicated to St. Aaron.

The Finnish Jabal Haroon Project (FJHP) is directed by Jaakko Frösen of the University of Helsinki (Finland). He is joined in overall project management and analysis by Zbigniew T. Fiema of Dumbarton Oaks centre for Byzantine studies (U.S.), who has worked at Petra for much of the past decade.

Jabal Haroon mountain is located about five kilometres west of central Petra, and is so named because it is believed to be the same place as Mount Hor, where Aaron, Moses' older brother, died and was buried.

Aaron, the older brother of Moses and younger brother of Miriam, was the first high priest in the Bible. He was denied entry to Canaan, like Moses, and died and was buried on a mountaintop in Transjordan (Exodus 4:14-7:1; Micah 6:4).

Aaron is known in Arabic as Nebi Haroon (the Prophet Aaron). The Quran describes him as an inspired and righteous man, a prophet who was "granted authority by God" and "guided along the straight path" (Quran 4:163; 6:85; 19:53; 23:45; 28:34-37; 118). Aaron is also frequently mentioned with Moses in the Quran ("We gave Moses and Aaron the salvation and a rianance," 21:48).

The Bible says that God gave Aaron instructions and spoke to him and Moses (Numbers 18 and 19). Aaron was the "prophet" of Moses, in that he spoke for Moses, because Moses was shy and humble, and not an eloquent speaker. He is referred to in Psalms as the one "whom God had chosen" and "the holy one of the Lord" (Psalm 105:26; 106:16).

When it came time for Aaron to die, he and his son Eleazar climbed the

mountain with Moses "in the sight of the whole community." Moses ceremoniously took off Aaron's priestly garments and placed them on Eleazar. "And Aaron died there on top of the mountain." Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain, "and when the whole community learned that Aaron had died, the entire house of Israel mourned him for thirty days." (Numbers 20:27-29).

Aaron is also known for the Priestly Blessing, also called the Aaronic blessing (Numbers 6:24-26): "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace."

In view of Aaron's rich moral legacy and his religious role, Mt. Aaron is considered holy by all three monotheistic Abrahamic faiths: Muslim, Christian and Jewish traditions alike believe that Aaron was buried on the summit of the mountain. Local tradition says that an eagle picked up Aaron's body and deposited it there at its final resting place. The spot was later commemorated with a church and subsequently by the Islamic "weli" or shrine that stands there today.

Religious facilities were reported on the mountain from as early as the Nabataean-Roman period, including references to the burial place of Aaron by the Roman-Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (end of the 1st century AD) and subsequent Byzantine and Arab sources. In the early 4th century AD also the church historian Eusebius wrote that Mount Hor was in the Petra region.

The large Byzantine church excavated in recent years by American archaeologists in central ancient Petra produced a cache of carbonised 6th century Byzantine papyrus scrolls. One scroll, dated to June 15, AD 513,



Part of the excavated apse area of the Byzantine church on Mt. Aaron (photo by J. Frosen)



The white Islamic shrine at the top of Mt. Aaron (at left) and the area of the Byzantine monastery and pilgrimage centre (arrow) before excavations started last year (photo by Jane Taylor)

was the last will of a man called Obodianos, son of Obodianos; it mentioned the "House of Our Lord the Saint High-Priest Aaron" in the vicinity. Scholars took this as confirmation that Aaron was venerated in the Petra area during the Byzantine period, and the obvious place for such veneration would have been the mountain long associated with him. The date of the abandonment of the mountaintop by the Christians who used the monastic complex cannot be determined accurately, but must have happened by the mid-14th century AD, when the present Islamic shrine was built on the summit.

Recent explorations consid-

ered the ruins located below the summit of the mountain, along with the tomb of Aaron, to be those of a Byzantine monastic complex and pilgrimage centre, and the 1998 excavation showed that the complex contained a church, a chapel and probably a hostel, that were used from perhaps the 5th to the 8th centuries AD.

The Finnish project com-

pleted an initial reconnaiss-

ance survey of the entire

mountain area in 1997, setting

the stage for the October 1998

excavation. The work aims

primarily to investigate the

Byzantine and Early Islamic

periods in Petra, both of

which are not well documen-

ted due to the traditional schol-

arly emphasis in this region

on Nabataean or earlier

remains.

The overall research goals

of the project include: study-

ing the variations in human

occupation of the mountain

over the ages, especially the

area of the presumed monastic

complex near the summit;

investigating the patterns of

how humans adapted to the

resources of the area, includ-

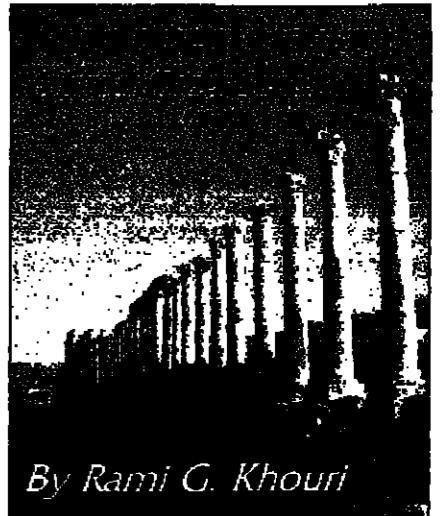
ing agricultural and other

forms of land exploitation in

ancient and recent times; and,

identifying Mt. Aaron's wider

historical significance.



By Rami G. Khouri

including its relations to Petra and the immediate vicinity from Nabataean through Islamic times.

The 1998 fieldwork focused on the buried architectural complex located on the plateau some 70 metres below the summit of the mountain, with the Islamic shrine on the summit visible above. The entire monastic complex, measuring some 75 x 45 metres, was intensively surveyed and mapped last year.

Four excavations considered the ruins located below the summit of the mountain, along with the tomb of Aaron, to be those of a Byzantine monastic complex and pilgrimage centre, and the 1998 excavation showed that the complex contained a church, a chapel and probably a hostel, that were used from perhaps the 5th to the 8th centuries AD.

The Finnish project completed an initial reconnaissance survey of the entire mountain area in 1997, setting the stage for the October 1998 excavation.

The work aims primarily to investigate the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods in Petra, both of which are not well documented due to the traditional scholarly emphasis in this region on Nabataean or earlier remains.

The regional survey of the mountain and its adjacent wadis revealed the presence of a complex water harnessing and irrigation system first built by the Nabataeans in the 1st century AD, and comprising dams, cisterns, water channels and other structures.

Some 30 scholars and students

from the University of Helsinki and the Helsinki University of Technology participated in the 1998 season, along with two scholars from other countries and two representatives of the Jordanian Department of Antiquities.

Dr. Fawzi Zayad and Hani Falabat. The excavations were funded by the Emil Aaltonen Foundation (Finland) with logistical assistance by the Jordanian Department of Antiquities. The 1998 excavations were funded by the Emil Aaltonen Foundation (Finland) with logistical assistance by the Jordanian Department of Antiquities.

Aspirin at 100, still a 'wonderdrug'

By Matt Karnitschnig
Reuters

IT'S BEEN said to cure or prevent everything from headaches to heart attacks.

Some call it "the wonderdrug." Felix Hoffmann, its German inventor, called it acetylsalicylic acid.

Most know it simply as Aspirin.

Saturday, March 6, the German company Bayer celebrated Hoffmann's discovery by marking the 100th anniversary of Aspirin's launch.

Simple to make and even easier to administer, Aspirin, like Coca Cola, and Levi's, is one of only a handful of brands to have transcended cultures, borders and generations to enjoy almost universal recognition.

Mentioned in films and fiction, the drug has become as enduring an element of life in the 20th century as the car and television.

The Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega Y Gasset summed up the remedy's influence in the 1930s, saying modern man lived in "the age of the Aspirin."

One hundred years after its introduction, Bayer's annual Aspirin sales total about one billion marks (\$555.6 million), a tidy sum for a product whose potential was at first doubted by the firm's management.

Despite Hoffmann's championing of his discovery, his bosses at Bayer were more interested in his laboratory's work on another compound — diacetylmorphine, which they viewed as an alternative for patients given morphine to treat coughs.

Bayer called its new cough medicine heroin, only later discovering that its "heroic" powers were addictive.

Two years after Hoffmann developed Aspirin, it underwent clinical trials at a Berlin hospital, a first for any drug. The results convinced Bayer to go ahead with it.

Berlin's imperial patent office granted Bayer a trademark for Aspirin on March 6, 1899 but the company was denied patent protection because of its similarity to earlier discoveries.

The name Aspirin is derived from acetyl and spiraea ulmaria, the plant that produces salicylic acid, the drug's active ingredient.

Sold initially in powder form, Aspirin would later become the first drug to be sold as a tablet.

Legend behind the discovery legend has it that Hoffmann's discovery about came as a result of his search for a treatment for his father's rheumatism.

Doctors prescribed Hoffmann senior salicylic acid, the application of which as a painkiller dates back to Hippocrates in 440 BC.

But the drug irritated the elder Hoffmann's stomach, a problem common among patients at the time.

Over the years, the medical applications for Aspirin have multiplied.

From its inception it has been used against inflammation and to relieve pain and fever, but it was only more recently that scientists discovered its effectiveness in helping prevent cardiovascular diseases, colorectal cancer, and strokes.

In Britain, doctors have found that taking a soluble Aspirin within a few hours of suffering chest pain can prevent the onset of a heart attack and have urged everyone to carry the drug.

For those who take the warning to heart, a British company has crafted Aspirin cuff links which can be had for about 30 pounds (\$48.22).

Whether from a package, a bottle or cuff links, the human race consumes some 100 billion Aspirin tablets a year, making it by far the world's best selling and most trusted remedy.

David versus Goliath in case over use of marijuana as medicine

By Amy Roe
Agence France Presse

FLORIDA IS steeped in the debate over whether marijuana should be used legally as medicine, and the state's high court will hear a case next month that could legalise the practice.

Sheriff's deputies busted George Sowell, a 61-year-old glaucoma patient, in September 1995 for growing marijuana in the woods near his rural Washington County home.

His case is one of only three medical marijuana cases ever argued in Florida, and the first to be heard before the Florida Supreme Court.

Sowell's attorney, John Daniel of Panama City, said Sowell was growing marijuana so he would not have to purchase it from street dealers. Sowell had tried to get into a federal medical marijuana programme which had been discontinued, Daniel said.

But lawyers for the state attorney general say Sowell could have used perfectly legal prescription drugs that minus the effects of marijuana.

Initially, a trial judge denied Sowell's medical necessity defence, but in 1997, the Tallahassee-based First District Court upheld an appeal.

The case will be heard on April 7.

Meanwhile, Floridians for Medical Rights is circulating a petition to get a medical marijuana initiative on the November ballot.

Alaska, Arizona, California, Nevada and Washington State have passed similar initiatives, and one is on the November ballot in Oregon.

gon.

A few Florida residents now obtain government-grown marijuana as holdovers from the now-defunct Compassionate Use programme. Then president George Bush's administration closed the programme in 1992, but allowed 13 participants to continue their treatment.

Glaucoma patient Elvy Mufikka of Hollywood, Florida is one of them.

In 1988 she was arrested for growing marijuana she used to treat her glaucoma. She faced a 5,000-dollar fine and five years in jail.

The case received national media attention, and Mufikka gained public support from South Florida and around the country. Defended by a pro bono attorney, Mufikka won and later became the third person admitted to the Compassionate Use programme.

Mufikka credits her marijuana use with saving her vision.

Diagnosed with glaucoma in 1975 as a result of childhood cataracts, Mufikka spent 12 years in and out of hospitals for surgeries that she said were, at best, ineffective, with some procedures even exacerbating her vision loss.

"Finally, a compassionate doctor told me if I didn't start smoking marijuana, I would go blind," she said.

At first, Mufikka was sceptical.

"I really questioned his sanity," she said. But after trying marijuana she found it not only worked best, but she did not develop a tolerance to it, as she did with her prescription drugs.

She said she tried the synthetic prescription versions of marijuana, such as Marinol, but they were a poor substitute.

"It only worked for one week," she said. Mufikka said, "For most (glaucoma) patients, the most it works for is six weeks."

Mufikka and her physician documented her marijuana use, and took the data to the Bascom-Palmer Eye Institute in Miami, but doctors there refused to acknowledge the study, she said. She now receives marijuana with a prescription, and prefers to add it to baked goods.

"Here it is 23 years later and it is still working for me," she said.

A medical marijuana activist, Mufikka said she's hoping Florida will join the more than 30 states which have made medical marijuana use legal.

She said the ill and dying should be allowed to use marijuana openly and without fear of prosecution.

"We are condemning the people to the permanent jail of blindness," Mufikka said, adding: "It's time we make our legislators accountable for the people who are dying as we speak."

Daniel, the attorney for George Sowell, said he would cite Mufikka's 1993 appellate court ruling.

"If we win, it will further affect different Florida rulings on medical marijuana," he said. "It's little old George Sowell against the state attorney general and the State of Florida. It really is David and Goliath."

Russian brain surgery removes appetite for drugs

By Marina Koreneva
Agence France Presse

IVAN SIROTKIN, 20, had tried meat and time again to kick his drug habit, without success, before he went to the St. Petersburg Human Brain Research Institute and got cured.

In a three-hour operation, surgeons neutralised using a cryosurgical technique the part of his brain causing his addiction, with the result that he has completely lost his appetite for drugs.

Jordan, Egypt inaugurate linkage of electricity grids tomorrow

AMMAN (J.T.) — Jordan and Egypt will tomorrow inaugurate the linking of their national electricity grids during a ceremony to be attended by His Majesty King Abdullah and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, according to Minister of Information Naser Lawzi.

In a press briefing following a regular Cabinet meeting Saturday, Lawzi said King Abdullah and Mubarak will meet in the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Taba before they both travel to Aqaba. He added that the two leaders will discuss bilateral ties and developments in the peace process particularly on the Israeli-Palestinian track.

Lawzi told the press that the linkage project was financed by the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development through a \$500 million soft loan.

Egypt is to be the cornerstone of the power grid

which will eventually link the Middle East, North Africa and Europe through Syria, Iraq, Turkey, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, Spain and Italy.

Israel was to have joined the grid under regional economic projects aimed at cementing its peace agreements with Arab countries, but such schemes have withered since Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu came to power in 1996.

Egypt and Libya joined their grids in May of last year while Egypt and Jordan connected their networks in October although the connection is officially being celebrated on Tuesday.

The connection between Egypt and Jordan, which joins the continents of Asia and Africa, cost \$500 million. The link between Jordan and Syria and between Syria and Turkey will take place later in the year but

Iraq will not join the grid until the year 2002 because of U.N. economic sanctions.

The links are based on the purchase and sale of electricity of different countries and are part of a larger project labelled "Mediterranean Power Pool," due to be operational by the year 2010. The entire project is being financed by the Arab Fund, the Islamic Development Bank and the European Investment Bank.

In his press briefing, Lawzi said that no date has been fixed for King Abdullah's visit to Damascus.

Commenting on the extension of the present ordinary session of the Constitution, the King can extend the ordinary session for a period of three more months.

Asfour says Ministry of Industry and Trade plans wide-ranging economic improvements

AMMAN (Petra) — Minister of Trade and Industry Mohammad Asfour said Sunday the ministry has a plan to upgrade all economic sectors, enhance investments, support industrial estates, lay down infrastructure and build workers' residences near these estates.

Asfour said Jordan proposed the construction of workers' houses during the visit of a UAE delegation to the Kingdom earlier this month, led by Sheikh Sultan Ben Zayed Al Nahyan.

Asfour said the UAE showed interest and readiness to help Jordan construct the houses.

The minister said that the trade ministry is currently preparing to establish a department to help citizens finish their transactions quickly and smoothly.

Asfour said the ministry will work with and support private sector investors.

"We will support

exporters in reaching world markets through our future membership in the World Trade Organisation," said the minister.

He added the ministry will support the industrial cities, and that a full study will be carried out for all these estates to help lay down infrastructure.

Jordan and the UAE announced on March 9 the establishment of a joint investment company involving business communities from the two countries.

The new company will invest at least JD100 million in development projects in the Kingdom.

U.S. Treasury official: Global stability requires open markets

WASHINGTON (AP) — The world economy's stability depends largely on unfettered international trade, the U.S. Treasury's Deputy Secretary Lawrence Summers said here Saturday.

"It is important that the world market stay open," Summers said at a meeting of the Trilateral Commission, a consultative body that includes top U.S., Japanese and European econo-

my officials.

To illustrate his point, the

deputy secretary described a chain of ties linking worldwide economic growth with free trade.

Without referring directly to

current tensions plaguing U.S.-European trade relations, Summers warned that a trend toward state-subsidised or state-protected markets would carry grave risks.

On a separate theme, he said

a top goal now for the United States is to achieve a "soft landing" for its economy after eight consecutive years of growth.

For 1998, U.S. growth was

just under four per cent. Econo-

mists expect 1999's perfor-

mance will be just below 2.5

per cent.

"The U.S. expansion is a rela-

tively healthy one — the growth of investment and exports has been relatively strong," Summers said, adding that inflation had been suc-

cessfully held in check.

But he said it would be

important for the U.S. savings

rate to rise.

Or Brazil, Summers said it

was too early to tell whether

Latin America's largest econo-

my had stabilised, less than a

week after the country's govern-

ment reached agreement with the International Monetary Fund on revised conditions for aid.

But Summers predicted that

investment capital will soon

return to Brazil if authorities

there can stabilise the situation,

which he said is highly likely

now that most international

banks have committed to main-

taining the fixed assets they

currently have in the country.

The U.S. Treasury official

also noted that Argentina and

Mexico had done well at fend-

ing off contagion from Brazil's

financial turmoil.

Exchange Rates							
	US DOLLAR	EURO	YEN	DEUTSCHE MARK	FRANCFRANC	ITALIAN LIRA	GBRITISH POUND
JORDAN DINAR	1.0000	0.14888	0.1927	1.8777	1.8387	0.1945	2.3100
BAUDI RYAL	5.2973	1.0000	1.0208	9.9470	9.7403	1.0301	12.2365
BALE DINAH	5.1833	0.9795	1.0000	9.7441	9.5416	1.0091	11.9869
BAHREINI DINAR	5.0326	1.0005	1.0226	1.0000	0.9792	1.0336	1.1106
COOMAN RYAL	5.5438	1.0207	1.0148	1.0212	1.0000	1.0558	1.2563
DATAN RYAL	5.1427	0.9708	0.9910	9.6656	9.4555	1.0000	11.8793
KUWAIT DINAR	4.3429	0.0817	0.0834	0.8129	0.7980	0.0842	1.0000
EGYPT POUND	4.8136	0.9087	0.9276	9.0385	8.8508	0.9360	11.1191
LEBANON LIRA	21.2288	4.0075	4.0803	39.8621	39.0339	4.1280	49.0373
US DOLLAR	1.4124	0.2666	0.2722	2.6522	2.5971	0.2745	3.2626
GBRITIAN STERLIN	0.8882	0.1633	0.1667	1.6246	1.5905	0.1692	1.9588
GERMANY MARK	2.5322	0.4782	0.4892	4.7367	4.6578	0.4926	5.8515
SWITZERLAND FRAN	2.0720	0.3911	0.3983	3.8807	3.8099	0.4028	4.7883
FRANCE FRANC	8.4956	1.8038	1.8372	15.9525	15.6211	1.6520	19.6245
JAPAN YEN	1.5787	0.3169	0.3233	3.1521	3.0686	0.3264	3.8777
HOLLAND GULDEN	2.8541	0.5388	0.5500	5.3592	5.2478	0.5550	6.5978
SWEDEN KRONA	11.4875	2.1648	2.2059	21.5330	21.0856	2.2259	26.4884
ITALY LIRA	25.0782	4.7341	4.8327	47.0803	46.1119	4.8765	52.9295
BELGIAN FRANC	52.2486	9.8632	10.0656	98.1094	96.0706	10.1598	120.6917
AUSTRIA DOLLA	2.2173	0.4186	0.4273	4.1835	4.0770	0.4312	5.1219
GREEK DRACHMA	4.1956	0.7620	0.8058	7.8783	7.7145	0.8158	9.6917
CYPRUS POUND	0.7483	1.4113	1.4042	1.4051	1.3759	0.1455	1.7285
AUSTRIA SCHILLING	17.6212	3.3642	3.4342	33.4635	32.7882	3.4854	41.1561
CANADA DOLLAR	2.1532	0.4065	0.4149	4.0432	3.9562	0.4187	4.9739
EURO	1.2946	0.2444	0.2495	2.4310	2.3804	0.2517	2.9305

CURRENCY	1.00 US DOLLAR	2.00 EURO	5.00 YEN	10.00 DEUTSCHE MARK	25.00 FRANCFRANC	50.00 ITALIAN LIRA	100.00 GBRITISH POUND
US DOLLAR	1.0000	1.6325	0.5678	0.6817	0.8414	0.4949	5.6321
GBRITIAN STERLIN	0.6712	1.0000	0.3415	0.4178	0.5154	0.3201	3.4500
GERMANY MARK	1.7305	2.9229	1.0000	1.2226	2.9862	1.5000	6.9676
SWITZERLAND FRAN	1.4970	2.3949	0.8180	1.0330	2.4283	1.2243	5.2623
FRANCE FRANC	8.0749	9.8183	3.3537	4.1031	5.0000	2.9785	33.0765
JAPAN YEN	11.86500	19.04228	6.62671	8.0157	19.7983	1.0000	58.8163
HOLLAND GULDEN	2.0207	3.2988	1.2167	1.3774	3.0386	1.7002	11.3908
SWEDEN KRONA	17.7554	28.9887	9.8889	12.1033	25.9169	14.9393	19.3711
ITALY LIRA	35.8920	60.3894	20.6256	25.2161	31.8151	18.3065	20.3423
BELGIAN FRANC	35.8920	60.3894	20.6256	25.2161	31.8151	18.3065	20.3423
AUSTRIA DOLLA	1.5699	2.5268	0.8783	1.0701	2.0210	1.3209	3.8416
GREEK DRACHMA	2.9705	4.8483	1.8503	2.0249	3.6939	1.4700	4.7301
CYPRUS POUND	0.5298	0.8649	0.2854	0.3611	0.6881	0.4458	0.9580
A							

Daily Beat

A review of news from the Arabic Press

Farmers fall deeper in financial troubles due to low prices of produce

** FARMERS IN the Jordan Valley say they are living in bad conditions because of declining prices and their inability to honour their obligations as the marketing bottlenecks have reached level that cannot be tolerated anymore. "Ignoring this reality will exacerbate the problem," the farmers said warning that the continuity of this situation will lead them to more losses and to abandoning the agricultural work.

According to the farmers, public and private creditors have not stopped chasing them for repayment of debts which have accumulated over tens of years. As such, they are afraid they will have to announce selling their property in auction as they are unable to repay their dues.

Mahmoud Ali Hassan, a farmer, says it has become customary that farmers resort to display their produce on the sides of the main road in Al Ghor to get rid of the surplus which cannot be absorbed by the local markets. "The farmers are convinced that is not worth it to route their produce to the central markets because the return does not cover the production costs," Hassan said.

Nayef Maslahah, also a farmer, says the official response has been limited to promises and assurances that were not implemented to solve the agricultural problems which have persisted for many years. He specifically mentioned the low prices which is associated with the marketing issue.

Ahmad Salibi, another farmer, said production exceeds the local consumption need of vegetables besides the absence of markets that can absorb the surplus. "The farmer has knocked on all the doors for a solution to the agricultural problem but without any success even to help with simple matters that can break the siege surrounding him," Salibi stressed.

Another farmer, Hassan Mustafa, said the agricultural sector in Jordan has in general been hit by a series of setbacks and losses that have overburdened and accumulated the indebtedness of farmers. "This season is not different than other seasons," he said. "The average daily consumption of vegetables does not exceed 750 tonnes and if we divide this volume by the number of people in the country we will find that the Jordanian consumer does not take his daily need of vegetables because of the deteriorating financial conditions and high cost of living."

Mustafa saw the flotation of prices as a negative factor that hurt the farmer and the consumer and called on the government to formulate an emergency plan to sort out the farming problems that have been unresolved for many years (Al Ra'i).

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR MONDAY, MARCH 15, 1999

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Your friends are full of wild and crazy ideas today, and you want to go along with all of them. You tend to get further out on the edge than most of the others you know. They talk about it, but you really do it. Hmm! It kind of looks like you might get away with it, but do be careful.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) Somebody may be pushing you to take action, but you need to make your own decisions, and you need to check things out carefully before you do that. The other person is enthusiastic and even a little frantic, perhaps, but you're the one with the common sense, so use it.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) You may think you have everything figured out today, but don't be too sure of yourself. Looks like there could be some changes, one of them unexpected. Take a cue from an older person who's had more experience than you have. The advice you get in private could be more useful than the instructions you get in public.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 22) If you've been worried about money lately, just settle down. There will probably be enough for everything you have planned, especially since you're so good at managing it. Besides, you're drawing favourable attention from people in high places.

LEO: (July 23 to August 21) A partner's crazy scheme could have you baffled. You don't understand everything, but you don't have to, either. If the other person knows what's going on, that could be enough for you. And if it's not well, you've got the wrong partner, especially if your money is involved.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) You should be drawing quite a bit of attention from the good job you've been doing. You do careful work, and you can be relied upon. So more and more people are asking you to do things for them. Instead of getting overwhelmed, find a partner who can help. You already know a likely prospect.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) It may take you a while to get back to work from your fascinating weekend, but you ought to do that. Looks like there's a lot of stuff piled up, waiting for you. All the fun won't have to go out of your life, however. Just the opposite is true. You'll be making so much money, you'll be able to afford to have even more fun.

SCORPIO: (October 24 to November 21) This day gets better as it goes along. You may start out with a difficult problem, but by the time the day's over, you'll have reached a very workable solution. You will, that is, if you don't get stuck arguing with a person who's never going to change. That's a waste of time, so don't even go there.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Think carefully today about changes you want to make to your home. You don't want to rush into anything, no matter what your sweetheart says. Instead, think it out carefully, so by the time you're done, you have something to be proud of. Get your loved one to help. That will keep him or her from nagging you to death.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) If you're deciding how to spend your money, here's a clue. Get something you can learn how to do, to improve your skills. The more skills you develop, the more money you can make, and the more money you make, the more skills you can develop. This is a win-win situation, and you're on the upside of the learning curve now.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You are amazingly intelligent right now. You have so many good ideas, it's hard to keep track of them all, and it's definitely hard to put them all in action. But that's what you'll get the chance to do, and soon. You've got a little more time for planning, but not much. Better get busy.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) This would be a good day to catch up on your reading. Looks like there's a little bit of homework in that stack, too — some studying you've been meaning to do but never quite got around to. Well, it could lead to an increase in your income, if that's any additional motivation.

Birthstone of March: Aquamarine — Jasper

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JO. EGYPT BK	0,670	0,640	- 4.48%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0,620	0,620	+ 0.00%
BANKS INDEX	288,080	points	+ 0.14%
INSURANCE			
JO. INS	2,800	2,800	+ 0.00%
JO. FRENCH INS	2,680	2,700	+ 1.05%
INSURANCE INDEX	125,930	points	+ 0.28%
SERVICES			
ELECTRIC POWER	1,670	1,680	+ 0.60%
PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	0,520	0,500	- 2.17%
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AL-RASTAN	2,650	2,650	+ 0.00%
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ARAB INT'L FOR INVEST & E	1,620	1,620	+ 0.00%
UNIFIED LAND TRANS	1,130	1,140	+ 1.77%
UNITED FOR FINANCIAL INV	1,680	1,680	+ 0.92%
SERVICES INDEX	113,480	points	- 0.17%
INDUSTRY			
CEMENT	3,750	3,720	- 0.80%
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ARAB POTASH	4,200	4,210	+ 0.24%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10,800	10,880	+ 0.85%
ARAB PETROLEUM	1,620	1,620	+ 0.00%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	3,070	3,030	- 1.30%
CERAMIC IND	1,280	1,280	+ 0.00%
JO. DAIRY	2,950	2,950	+ 0.00%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1,620	1,620	+ 0.00%
JO. OIL	0,620	0,620	+ 0.00%
DAR AL DAWA	6,150	6,110	- 6.65%
MIDDLE EAST COMPLEX	0,650	0,650	+ 0.00%
JO. STEEL	1,000	1,000	+ 0.00%
ARAB ALUMINUM	1,720	1,680	- 4.07%
CHLORINE	1,150	1,100	- 4.55%
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	0,350	0,350	+ 0.00%
YTL IND	0,350	0,350	+ 0.00%
PETRO - CHEMICAL	0,270	0,270	+ 0.00%
UNIVERSAL CHEMICAL	1,010	0,980	- 3.05%
NTL CABLE	0,610	0,600	- 1.64%
SULPHO - CHEMICALS	0,430	0,410	- 4.65%
LABOR CENTER FOR PHARM	1,270	1,270	+ 0.00%
EL-ZAY	1,270	1,260	- 0.75%
UNIVERSAL MODERN IND	0,620	0,610	- 1.61%
FOOD FACTORIES	1,000	1,000	+ 0.00%
IND. RESOURCES	0,630	0,620	- 1.63%
NEW CAPLES	0,670	0,680	+ 1.75%
NTL ALUMINUM	0,630	0,620	- 1.60%
INDUSTRY INDEX	96,550	points	- 0.38%
PARALLEL			
EXPORT BK 75%	0,970	0,940	- 1.05%
JO. INT'L INS	0,680	0,680	+ 0.00%
ARAB FINANCIAL INVES	0,600	0,620	+ 3.33%
ADVANTAGE FOR EDU	0,620	0,620	+ 0.00%
ADVANCED PHAR	0,650	0,650	+ 0.00%
AL - SHARQ	1,080	1,080	+ 0.00%
AL DAWLAH	0,720	0,710	- 1.38%
ARAB INVESTORS	1,080	1,080	+ 0.00%

Hammodeh Hair Designer

Mr. Hammodeh has come back to Jordan after a months leave. When he was called upon by the yellow strawberry group in the United States of America to participate with a number of hair dressers from Asia, Europe and Africa. He was the only hair dresser chosen from Asia.

Mr. Hammodeh has achieved wonderful success in the hair show and made sure to picture the most important works he made there and those pictures will be presented in world magazines. Yellow strawberry has picked the pictures to be presented in the magazines such as Hair Style guide and Hair Style.

The American people have been very hospitable and they offered help for any reason, they made me feel right at home and in my country and I will never forget the members of the yellow strawberry.

My trip was a fruitful one, filled with experience and moda, I'm offering my work for all my colleagues and who ever is interested in my trip on the internet: (www.cms.com.johammodeh)

E-mail: hammodeh@cms.go.com.jo
Tel: 09793828 / mobil: 079-522492

Last but not least I offer my thanks to the yellow strawberry group and all its partners, and for everyone that had a big role in me going to the United States especially Amer & Nidal Naser El Deen (CNS). And Soon the opening of the grandest saloon in the Middle East Hammodeh Two.

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Serena serves notice with victory over Graf

INDIAN WELLS (AFP) — Serena Williams confirmed her arrival as a power on the WTA Tour Saturday with a triumph over former World No. 1 Steffi Graf for the Evert Cup crown.

"I know that I can win the big ones now," said the 17-year-old American, who shrugged off a sore knee and rallied from a break down in the third set to beat Graf 6-3, 3-6, 7-5.

"I don't know how many matches I've won in a row, but it's enough to win a Slam. It's seven in a row to win a Slam. I'm prepared to do that."

Williams' victory — with her sister, Venus, and father, Richard, looking on — was her 11th straight.

She won her first WTA Tour title in the Open Gaz de France in Paris on February 28 and immediately followed it up with her first triumph in a prestigious Tier One event.

The fact that she beat Graf, whose 106 career titles include 21 Grand Slam triumphs, made it even more satisfying.

"She has more titles than any man or lady playing tennis," Williams said. "It's very exciting for me to have this win."

"I definitely feel that I've beaten almost everyone, now that I'm on this roll," added Williams, who beat World No. 2 Lindsay Davenport in the second round here but is still waiting for her first victory over World No. 1 Martina Hingis.

"I just have a couple of more people to play. There's always someone out there who's going to work harder and who's going to try to beat me, especially when you're on a streak."

"I'm just going to have to work as hard, if not harder, to keep it up."

Williams, who stretched Hingis to three sets in the Lipton Championships last year and lost a three-set heartbreaker to Sandrine Testud at the Australian Open in January, said her new sense of urgency suddenly hit her last month.

"One day in practice I realised I had to make changes in my game if I wanted to get to the top level," she said. "I think that particular day in practice was what really made me change. It was just before I went to Paris."

"That's when I realised I can't keep going out there losing to people I should beat if I want to be a top player. I have to win more matches."

Now that she's got that down, Williams said the sky's the limit.

"I definitely think in the next couple of months I'll be in the top 10," said Williams, who will move up a spot from 17th to 16th thanks to her win over Graf.

"The only thing that can keep me out of the top 10 is if I quit playing tournaments for the rest of the year. Other than that, I definitely see myself getting there soon — and farther."



Serena Williams of the U.S. hits a backhand against Steffi Graf of Germany during the Evert Cup final in Indian Wells, California. Williams defeated Graf 6-3, 3-6, 7-5 to win the cup (AFP photo)



German tennis player Steffi Graf reacts after losing a point against Serena Williams of the U.S. at the Evert Cup final in Indian Wells, California. Williams won 6-3, 6, 7-5 (AFP photo)

Hassan hat-trick sounds Champions League warning

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) — Veteran Egyptian star Hossam Hassan scored a hat-trick this weekend as Al-Ahly sounded an early warning to their African Champions League rivals with a 3-0 drubbing of Mazi Maji in Tanzania.

Hassan, joint leading scorer with South African star Benni McCarthy at the 1998 Nations Cup in Burkina Faso, struck after 23, 52 and 86 minutes in the first leg of a first-round tie.

While former champions Al-Ahly can prepare for a second-round clash with Rayon Sport of Rwanda or AFC Leopards of Kenya in May, two-time winners Raja Casablanca of Morocco must overcome a 1-0 loss to Ndiambour in Senegal.

Makhene Ndiaye scored the last-minute winner in the north-west town of Louga to present an unexpectedly early challenge for Raja coach Luis Oscar Fullone.

The Argentinian guided ASEC of Cote d'Ivoire to the Champions League title last December with a 4-2 aggregate victory over surprise finalists Dynamos of Zimbabwe.

Villa of Uganda were the most impressive winners, crushing Electricity from Ethiopia 5-0 in Kampala with Phillip Sozzi and Andrew Mukasa scoring two goals each.

The return of Libya to the competition after a six-year break seems likely to be shortlived following the 2-1 home loss suffered by Al-Mahalla against 1994 champions Esperance from Tunisia.

Faycal Ben Ahmed, a midfielder in the 1998 Tunisian World Cup squad, opened and closed the scoring in Tripoli after Rejeb Ammar raised Libyan hopes with a second-half equaliser.

Orlando Pirates equalled the record victory margin for a South African club in Africa with a 6-0 thrashing of Botswana Defence Force, who survived only 10 minutes before Simon Makubela triggered a Johannesburg goal avalanche.

Newcomers Wilki Tourists of Nigeria also began impressively by defeating Renaissance 4-0 in Kaduna, where Chiedozie Johnson struck twice during the second half.

Moya makes unlikely leap to the top

INDIAN WELLS (AFP) — Carlos Moya became the unlikely World No. 1 here Saturday, and as Gustavo Kuerten, the man he beat to get there, said, it couldn't happen to a nicer guy.

Moya was one of four players who started the \$2.45 million Champions Cup with a chance to unseat Pete Sampras.

The smart money was on second-ranked Russian Yevgeny Kafelnikov, who had already come within one match of claiming the top spot in February.

Kuerten took care of him in the second round. With Sampras, World No. 3 Alex Corretja and No. 5 Pat Rafter all early losers, Moya found himself in the enviable, but nerve-wracking, position of challenging for No. 1.

"You cannot say, 'OK, don't think about that, just play your match,'" Moya said. "The night before, the morning, it always came to my mind. I tried not to think about it. To play videos, watch movies, it was four matches away, it was still far. I had to play every match step-by-step."

Moya, the reigning French Open champion, was the only man to reach the semi-finals without dropping a set.

Kuerten, the 1997 Roland Garros champion, ruined that record, taking advantage of Moya's second-set, jitters to stretch the Spaniard to a 6-3, 1-6, 6-1 score.

"The key of the match was

the beginning of the third," Moya said. "when I broke him and then held my serve for three-love, I thought I had a good chance to win."

Moya, battling a shoulder injury and the flu, had made a mediocre start to the year. He lost in the second round at Sydney and in the first round of the Australian Open and at Marseille.

He turned the corner when he reached the semifinals at Dubai last month, and he credited coach Jose Perlas and fitness trainer Luis Miguel Morales with pulling him through the rough patch.

"When you are playing that bad, you think there's no way out. In Dubai I started to play better ... I came here and start to play better and better."

"They always trusted me a lot. They showed me there was a way out. In Dubai I started to play better ... I came here and start to play better and better."

Moya, whose Grand Slam history also includes a runner-up finish in Australia and a semifinal appearance at the U.S. Open, said he didn't expect his life to change, and he didn't expect his new status to affect the cameraderie he feels with other Spanish players like Corretja.

"Well, he beat me in Hannover. That time he was No. 3 in the world and I was No. 5. I was still talking to him."

"I think everything is going to be the same. I'm going to be the same person out of the court, I hope."

Sports
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LOCAL
SPORTS
SCENE

Boxers to get ca

Table tennis team

Syrian volleyball

SPORTS
IN BRIEF

Iranian footballers
head to U.S.

Mexicans capture
3rd consecutive
U.S. Cup title

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Robert De Niro.. in RONIN Shows: 12:30, 2:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	Tom Hanks & Sally Field .. in FORREST GUMP Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:30, 9:00	Comedian Adel Imam .. in AL ZATEEM Shows: 12:15, 3:15, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30	Adel Imam & Wafaa Amer .. in ALWAD MAHROUS BTA' Shows: 12:30, 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:30 AL WAZIR CONCORDE 2 FEAR	ABDOUN www.cns.com.jo/Galleria DANCE WITH ME Shows: 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:45	ABDOUN www.cns.com.jo/Galleria Michael Douglas .. in A PERFECT MURDER Shows: 3:30, 6:15, 8:30, 10:45	CLOSED

TODAY AT

Listings for films and showing times as received by cinemas and their advertising agencies.

390 taekwondo players prepare for Amman tournament

By a Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Around 390 taekwondo players from seven Arab and Asian countries will mark the 40-day mourning period of the passing away of His Majesty King Hussein by taking part in a two-day international championship here.

Players from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon and Chinese Taipei will participate in the First Amman International Championship for men and women, organised by Jordan's Champions Centre for Taekwondo on March 18-19 at the Palace of Sports.

President of the Championship's Higher Committee Wa'el Kamal said round-the-clock preparations will reflect positively on the activity, which will be held for the first time.

"The vast participation in the championship will help support the game, especially that it will come ahead of the 9th Pan-Arab Games and the 2000 Sydney Olympics," Kamal told reporters on Sunday.

International referees from Lebanon, Egypt, Yemen, Cyprus, Kuwait and Hong Kong will be officiating the matches which will have an electronic scoring system.

Four coaches headed by Samer Kamal train around 2000 players and another 100

black-belt holders at the eight-year-old Champions Centre.

Among these players are Wisam Abu Seif, who holds three dan black belt and won the golden medal in the 1993 national team qualifiers; Zaha Talhouni, the Kingdom's current champion, who holds a three dan black belt and won the 1997-1998 Arab championship and Al'A'Kutuk, who holds a two dan black belt and won the silver in the 1998 Asian Games.

Kamal, currently president of Arab Referees Committee, holds six international, Olympic and Asian medals and was honoured for his achievements by the late King Hussein with the Independence Medal in 1988.

With this selection, the centre won Jordan's under-13 Championship in the years 1991-93 and 1995-98; the 13-16 year-olds championship in the same years; the 13-16 year-olds championship for men in 1992; the 15-17 year-olds championship for men in 1992 and 1994 and the championship of women's categories since 1991.

In 1991 and 1992, the centre took part in organising Al Orthodoxi Club International Championship and also organised the first women's championship in 1994, the second in 1995 and the third in 1996.

LOCAL SPORTS SCENE



Boxers to get cash awards

AMMAN — Jordan Boxing Federation Vice-President Mohammad Eitan has pledged to award players who achieve medals in the 9th Pan-Arab Games (Al Hussein Games). In a meeting with the national team, Eitan said JD1,000 will be granted to those who would win the gold, JD500 for the silver and JD250 will go to boxers who would win the bronze. Eitan told the team that some obstacles facing a number of players were under careful study. These include Mohammad Abu Khadidjeh, who faces no competition in his category here and will thus participate in the Bangkok Championship in April and in a training camp in Kazakhstan. Other players will be trained in line with preparations as the Iraqi team will play here in April followed by a training camp in Tunisia.

Table tennis team to play in Beirut

AMMAN — The Jordan Table-Tennis Federation is currently preparing to take part in the Arab Federation Championship, which will be held in Beirut March 17-22. Tariq Najjar and Alia Tuffaha will represent the women's team, while Mustafa Redha and Iyad Meknai will represent the men's team. Tuffaha and Abdul Aziz Redha achieved the bronze in the previous event.

Syrian volleyball team arrives today

AMMAN — The Syrian women's volleyball team is expected to arrive on Monday to play three friendlies against the national team as part of preparations for the 9th Pan-Arab Games. The Iraqi men's volleyball team is expected to arrive here on Friday to play friendlies against the Jordanian counterparts.

Compiled by Ahmad Khatib

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Iranian footballers head to U.S.

TEHRAN (AFP) — Three renowned Iranian footballers are en route to the United States for a ceremony marking the historic Iran-U.S. match in last year's World Cup, the official news agency IRNA said Sunday. Hamid Estili, Ahmad-Reza Abedzadeh and Mohammad Khakpour were invited by a U.S.-based Iranian cultural group, IRNA said without giving further details. Iran won last summer's World Cup match 2-1 in the most important sporting competition between the two nations since Washington broke off diplomatic relations with Iran following the 1979 hostage-taking at the U.S. embassy in Tehran.

Mexicans capture 3rd consecutive U.S. Cup title

SAN DIEGO (AFP) — Juan Manuel Abundis scored in the 57th minute to give Mexico a 2-1 victory over the United States here Saturday, giving the Mexicans their third consecutive U.S. Cup title. The defeat was the first for the U.S. team since Bruce Arena took over as coach last November. The U.S. team, a last-place finisher in last year's World Cup at France, had won three and drew two in the run.

NBA		
Atlanta	86	Toronto
Dallas	91	Vancouver
Houston	100	Cleveland
San Antonio	92	Denver
Utah	99	Minnesota
Orlando	87	Golden State
Portland	106	LA Clippers
		96 (OT)

Italian League		
Juventus	2	Udinese
AS Roma	3	Bologna
Parma	2	Bari
Inter Milan	2	AC Milan

Spanish League		
Atletico Madrid	1	Real Mallorca
Real Zaragoza	0	Celta Vigo
R. Santander	1	Real Madrid
Real Betis	0	Valencia

French Cup round of last 16		
Guingamp	1	Lille
Amiens	1	Sedan
Angouleme	1	Troyes
Clermont	0	Le Mans
Montagnarde	0	Rouen
Lens	1	Laval

Laval won 4-2 on penalties

German League		
Werder Bremen	0	Wolfsburg
Schalke	2	Vfl Bochum
Kaiserslautern	2	Nuremberg
1860 Munich	1	VfB Stuttgart
Hamburg SV	0	Bayern Munich
Moncheng.	0	MSV Duisburg

Portuguese League		
Chaves	2	Guimaraes
FC Porto	3	Uniao Leiria
Dutch First Division		
Heerenveen	2	RKC Waalwijk
PSV Eindhoven	3	C. Leeuwarden
W. II Tilburg	2	De Graafschap

Belgian First Division		
G. Ekeren	1	Lierse
Westerlo	3	Standard Liege
St. Truiden	7	Lokeren
Lommel	0	Harelbeke
Beveren	1	Genk
Anderlecht	2	Aalst
Charleroi	2	Kortrijk
China	1	Iran

Chelsea's title dreams fade

LONDON (AFP) — Chelsea's Italian manager Gianluca Vialli admitted the battle for the English Premiership title was a two-horse race between Manchester United and Arsenal after the top two won and his side suffered their second home defeat in a row on Saturday.

Two goals by Andy Cole against his old club gave treble-chasing United a 2-1 victory at Newcastle; while Arsenal had Emmanuel Petit sent off for the third time this season but still won 2-0 at Everton.

Chelsea, who suffered their first home loss of the season when Manchester United knocked them out of the FA Cup on Wednesday, went down at Stamford Bridge for the first time in the league this season, 1-0 to West Ham.

Paul Kitson's 75th-minute strike for West Ham meant they are a full seven points behind United and three behind Arsenal even though they still have a game in hand.

But fourth-placed Leeds are now only two points worse off and Vialli said: "It's now a two-horse race between Arsenal and Manchester United."

"The players are disappointed as we now know that our title hopes are fading away."

"We will do our best to finish in the best possible position but looking at Arsenal and United, it will be very difficult indeed."

It was 1-1 between relegation-threatened pair Coventry and Blackburn at Highfield Road, the goals coming from John Aloisi in the 22nd minute and the Rovers equaliser from Jason Wilcox in the 67th.

Nottingham Forest, uncertain in most people's minds to go down, gave themselves a lifeline with an unlikely 3-1 win over Wimbledon at Selhurst Park.

Alan Rogers's cross-cum-shot put Forest still eight points adrift of safety, ahead after 21 minutes.

"I said: 'What a bad cross that lovely goal is,'" quipped Forest manager Ron Atkinson afterwards.

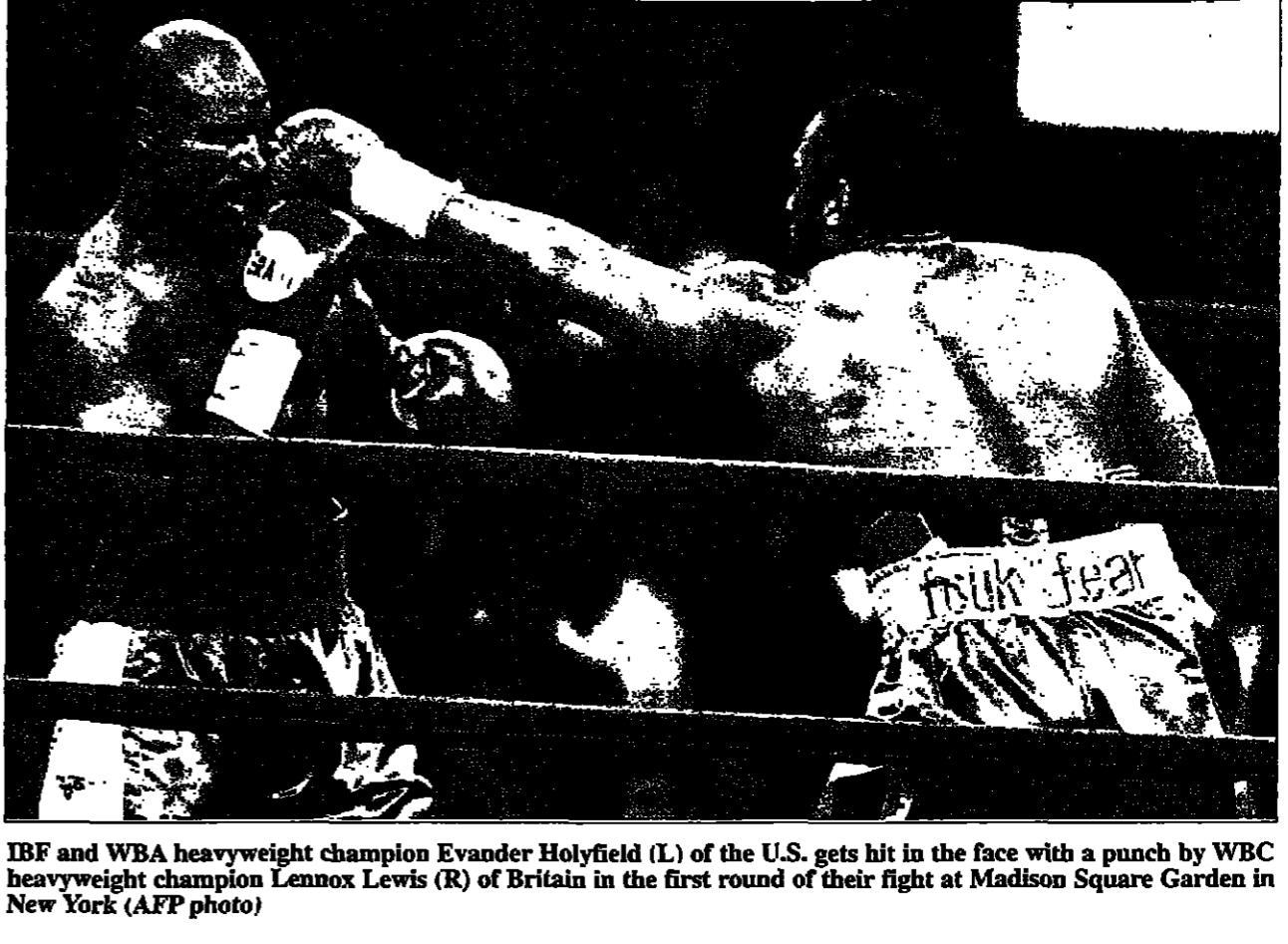
Dougie Freedman (59) and Neil Shipperley (84) completed a deserved fourth win of the season.

Marcus Gayle's 79th minute effort for Wimbledon was the highlight of a poor display which will have done little for the health of manager Joe Kinnear, who is recovering from a heart attack.

Charlton, also desperately in need of points down at the bottom, had to settle for a 1-1 draw with Leicester at Filbert Street.

But they were happy with the point after going a goal down to a Neil Lennon strike on the hour, then having Keith Jones sent off for a second yellow card and rescuing a draw only when Clive Mendonca equalised in injury time.

In-form Tottenham, meanwhile, showed out-of-form Aston Villa no mercy and won 1-0 at White Hart Lane thanks to an 88th-minute goal from Tim Sherwood.



IBF and WBA heavyweight champion Evander Holyfield (L) of the U.S. gets hit in the face with a punch by WBC heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis (R) of Britain in the first round of their fight at Madison Square Garden in New York (AFP photo)

Lewis-Holyfield showdown ruled controversial draw

decision and the mention of promoter Don King's name.

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Netanyahu denies policy change on freeing Palestinian prisoners

TEL AVIV (AFP) — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied reports Sunday that his government had dropped its hardline refusal to free Palestinians jailed for carrying out attacks on Israelis.

Speaking during a cabinet meeting, Netanyahu said he would never order the release of Palestinians "with blood on their hands, those who either wounded or killed Israelis, because we have not changed our criteria for freeing security prisoners."

But Netanyahu acknowledged that his government was considering freeing some Palestinian detainees as a "goodwill gesture" for the Muslim feast of the sacrifice, Eid Al Adha, which falls this year on March 27, his office said.

The prisoner issue is one of the most emotional for the Palestinians and Israel's refusal to release detainees "with blood on their hands" sparked widespread rioting in the occupied territories last year which in turn contributed to the breakdown of the Wye River peace accord.

Netanyahu was responding to a newspaper report that Israeli and Palestinian officials have secretly worked out a compromise deal to release

100 Palestinians political prisoners.

The Yediot Ahronot newspaper reported that Israel had agreed to ease its stance and would release some Palestinians convicted of involvement in attacks in which Israelis were hurt but not killed.

Those released were to be members of PLO chief Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement who have spent more than 10 years in jail and served at least two-thirds of their sentences, the newspaper said.

Yediot said Israeli Internal Security Minister Avigdor Kahalani negotiated the compromise with PLO deputy leader Mahmoud Abbas and chief peace negotiator Saeb Erekat and was currently finalising the list of releasable prisoners.

Kahalani's office declined to either confirm or deny the report, and there was no immediate comment from the Palestinian National Authority.

Palestinian sources estimate that around 3,000 Palestinians are held in Israeli jails and some 2,000 of these were convicted of politically motivated crimes, most of them committed before the first Israeli-PLO peace accord was signed in 1993.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Two wounded in shelling in Lebanon

TYRE (R) — A Lebanese man and woman were wounded on Sunday in shelling from inside Israel's south Lebanon occupation zone, a security source said. Kassim Nasser, 70, and Fatima Mughash, 30, were wounded in the village of Haddara just north of the western sector of the 15 km deep occupation zone, the source added. In Beirut, a spokesman for the Iranian-backed Hezbollah guerrilla movement claimed responsibility for several attacks on positions of Israeli troops and their local South Lebanon Army (SLA) militia allies inside the zone.

Israeli settler killed on army firing range

TEL AVIV (AP) — The mangled body of a 16-year-old Israeli youth was found Sunday on an army firing range in the West Bank, police said. The teenager, whose name was not immediately disclosed, had apparently picked up an unexploded shell or other explosive device, police spokeswoman Linda Menkin said. The youth, who was from the nearby Jewish settlement of Maale Adumim, had been missing since Saturday morning, she said.

Arafat holds talks with Sultan Qaboos

MUSCAT (AP) — Palestinian President Yasser Arafat discussed the Middle East peace process with Sultan Qaboos on Sunday, the official Oman news agency reported. It said Arafat briefed Qaboos on plans to declare a Palestinian state. Oman was Arafat's third stop in the Gulf after Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Iran executes killer of former official

TEHRAN (R) — Iran has executed a man who took part in killing a former prison chief and revolutionary prosecutor, the official news agency IRNA reported on Sunday. It quoted the Tehran revolutionary court as saying Ali Asghar Ghazanfarnejad-Jelodar, convicted for his part in the assassination of Assadollah Lajevardi last August, was executed on Sunday in the Evin prison in northern Tehran. There were no details on how the sentence was carried out. The man, a member of the Iraq-based armed opposition group Mujahideen Khalq Organisation, was charged with fighting the country's religious system and spreading corruption on earth.

Egyptian party members arrested

CAIRO (R) — Egyptian authorities have arrested three members of the opposition Tagammu party and charged them with threatening national security by calling for defiance of a proposed labour law, a rights group said on Sunday. The Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) said Mohammad Hassan Ouf, Yehia Fekry Amr and Wael Mohammad Tawfiq were arrested on Friday after the party held a seminar on a draft labour law designed to unify legislation between the private and public sectors. It said the three were blindfolded throughout a two-hour interrogation. State prosecutors accused them of harming national interests by advising public sector employees to oppose the law, which has not yet been passed by parliament. Bail was set at 30 pounds (\$14.60) each, EOHR said. The proposed labour law bars the right to strike, gives employers greater powers to dismiss employees, and reduces workers' vacation time and maternal leave for working mothers, other rights groups say.

Syria asks to open drug factory in Iraq

BAGHDAD (R) — Syria has asked to set up a drug plant in Iraq under Iraqi supervision, an Iraqi newspaper said on Sunday. "The health ministry... is studying a Syrian demand to establish a medicine factory in Iraq," the weekly Al Musawir Al Arabi said. The paper said the plant would belong to the private sector and would aim to supplement the public sector. It said the request came from the Syrian Al Razzi laboratories for drug industries.

Iraq says U.S., U.K. blocking pilgrims

BAGHDAD (AP) — Iraq's foreign ministry on Sunday accused the United States and Britain of deliberately blocking a UN accord aimed at financing Iraqis on the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. "The American and British representatives on the U.N. Sanctions Committee were opposed to Iraq spending its own money... to allow its citizens to undertake the pilgrimage," a ministry statement said. Sanctions Committee Chairman Arnold Peter van Walsum on Friday said Iraq was still refusing a U.N.-proposed compromise to allow 22,000 Iraqi pilgrims to carry out the pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia, known as the Haj.

U.S. envoy draws protests in Lebanon

KARAK (AFP) — The U.S. ambassador David Satterfield was caught up in a hostile demonstration in the eastern Bekaa Valley on Sunday, and his convoy was forced to drive over an Israeli flag, security services here said.

Satterfield's bodyguards were obliged to cock their weapons to clear a way through a crowd of about 200 supporters of the Shiite Muslim Hezbollah movement and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party — which calls for Lebanon to be part of a Greater Syria — in this village just north of the town of Zahle.

The demonstrators, marking the 21st anniversary of the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, shouted slogans attacking U.S. support of Israel.

Hezbollah supporters drove on to the Christian village of Qaa, north of the town of Baalbek, to present diplomas to information technology students.

Local officials in Qaa, including member of parliament Marwan Fares, issued a statement describing the ambassador's visit as "basely exploiting the end of a computing course" when his country's activities in the region "only serve the interests of the Zionist enemy."

The American ambassador uses the cover of humanitarian activities, although his country is supplying Israel with bombs, rockets and fighter planes that kill our children in southern Lebanon and in Baalbek, and destroy the infrastructure built under the guidance of [Lebanese] President Emile Lahoud and [Syrian] President Hafez Al Assad," the statement said.

"As long as Damascus sticks by its demand for the full return of the Golan Heights as a condition for resuming negotiations, they will not resume," Arens said during a campaign visit to this Arab town outside Jerusalem.

He spoke as the top U.S. State Department official for the Middle East, Martin Indyk, met in Damascus with Foreign Minister Farouk Al Sharra on the peace process.

Indyk, a former ambassador to Israel, said afterwards the two men discussed "how to prepare the ground for an effort to resume the negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks after the Israeli elections" in May.

Israel-Syria negotiations

were suspended three years ago before the right-wing government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu came to power in

Syria must drop Golan demand before talks resume

ABU GOSH (AFP)

Defence Minister Moshe Arens said Sunday that renewed U.S. efforts to revive peace talks between Israel and Syria would succeed only if Damascus dropped its conditions concerning a return of the Golan Heights.

"Attempts to renew the peace negotiations with Syria are totally one-sided," Arens said as a senior U.S. official was in Damascus to discuss peace efforts and the crisis in Lebanon.

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sticks by its demand for the full return of the Golan Heights as a condition for resuming negotiations, they will not resume," Arens said during a campaign visit to this Arab town outside Jerusalem.

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were suspended three years ago before the right-wing government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu came to power in

May 1996 elections.

During the talks, Israel's previous Labour government agreed to the principle of trading territory on the Golan Heights in return for peace with Syria.

Netanyahu has refused

Syrian demands that the peace talks resume where they left off.

In the absence of an Israeli-Syrian accord, Israel has also been unable to end the fighting in Lebanon, the last active battlefield in the Arab-Israeli conflict where Israel occupied a buffer zone along the neighbouring state's southern border.

Lebanon, which is dominated

by Syria, has refused to negotiate separately with Israel, demanding either a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from south Lebanon or a negotiated regional peace including a Golan pullout.

A recent spate of troop losses

in Lebanon, including the killing by Syria-backed guerrillas of Israel's top general in the zone, has increased pressure on the Israeli government to resolve the conflict.

Opposition Labour Party

chief and prime ministerial candidate Ehud Barak, who leads Netanyahu in most opinion polls, had promised if elected to withdraw from Lebanon within a year and resume peace negotiations with Syria.

ABU DHABI (AFP)

Despite a cash crunch, the world's top arms manufacturers deployed in force at a defence exhibition which opened here Sunday in the Gulf, a region which has seen two major conflicts in as many decades.

Sheikh Ben Zayed Al Nahayan, deputy supreme commander of the Emirati armed forces, opened the five-day fair which has attracted more than 800 exhibitors — a record for the biannual show launched in 1993 — from 40 countries.

The show comes on the heels of a slight recovery in oil prices, which last year fell more than 30 per cent.

"It's all oil-related in this region. There's already a new air of optimism with oil prices on the way up," said defence analyst Paul Beaver, referring to an accord last week to slash more than two million barrels a day off world output.

Britain tops the list of exhibitors, followed by France and the United States, while Bosnia and Kuwait are among the newcomers along with Iran, making a debut despite an island dispute with the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The UAE itself is in the market to build up its navy with six patrol boats, eight corvettes and at least 10 fast interceptor vessels, with the smaller craft likely to be awarded locally.

Industry sources said British Aerospace is hoping to "piggy-back" a contract for Hawk trainer aircraft following the UAE's purchase of 30 Mirage 2000-9 combat aircraft.

Food critic ends secrecy efforts

NEW YORK (AP) — After consuming 2,800 restaurant meals in more than five years of writing food reviews for the New York Times, Ruth Reichl is about to abandon the cloak-and-dagger routine. Reichl, 51, will stop wearing wigs, fake glasses and other disguises as she moves to a new job as head of the monthly cooking and travel "Gourmet" magazine.

"We can't complain," said Danielle, 35, who was one of 76 residents hurriedly evacuated four days ago when the boulder's tilt accelerated dramatically. She said she and her family had been relocated into a comfortable, modern apartment in La Tania ski resort above the boulder. "My older daughter is delighted because she can go outside to ski," Danielle said. The massive rock has been closely monitored since a series of landslides in 1974. But when the average one millimetre a month tilt accelerated to 8.3 millimetres a day, the evacuation order was given.

Government announces reward for rat catchers

U.S. Defence Secretary William Cohen, on a visit to Abu Dhabi last week, expressed guarded confidence that the \$6 billion sale was still on track. "I think we are moving ahead with the proposal... We hope to continue to make progress on it."

The UAE wants the fighter to be capable of identifying other U.S.-made warplanes as potential foes, something which the Pentagon has resisted, according to U.S. defence officials.

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GUAHAN (AP)

Wanted: rats, dead or alive. A government in a remote northeastern Indian state is offering a cash reward to any one bringing a rat tail.

With thousands of big rodents feasting on foodgrains, tribespeople in the mountainous state of Mizoram are turning into rat killers. "The situation is indeed alarming and if preventive steps are not taken immediately, the state may witness a severe disaster," said C. Rokhuma, vice chairman of newly-formed state rodent control committee.

"The rats have caused extensive damage to human properties, paddy fields, pepper cultivation, besides biting people," Rokhuma told the Associated Press. The state government already has paid 90,000 rupees (\$2,100) as reward to rat catchers.



ANTI-PINOCHET DEMO IN HUMAN RIGHTS SQUARE: Protestors take part in an anti-Pinochet demonstration Sunday on the Human Rights Square in Paris, ahead of Chilean President Eduardo Frei's official visit to France on Monday. Former Chilean dictator General Augusto Pinochet is under police custody in London fighting extradition to Spain, where a judge wants to try him for human rights violations during his 1973-90 dictatorship (AP photo)



Ski resort to end nude tradition

DENVER (AP) — The Colorado ski resort of Crested Butte has banned nude skiing on its slopes next month, putting an end to an annual event that began 25 years ago. The practice of skiing in the buff on the last day of the season has become an embarrassment for this post-yet-family-friendly resort south of Aspen. Last year hundreds of nude skiers from across the U.S. west took over the resort's slopes and solariums as scores of sightseers recorded the action with video cameras. To ensure that skiers are properly attired on April 18, the resort announced it had formed a special patrol to comb the resort for violators.

Swiss 'jail break' king behind bars

BERN (AP) — Walter Stuern, widely known as Switzerland's "jail break king," is back behind bars. Police said that Stuern was arrested on suspicion of taking part in a 100,000 Swiss franc (\$68,000) armed robbery of a bank along with an escaped convict. He was released from jail last October after serving a 10-year sentence for robbery. Stuern, 57, has achieved near cult status in Switzerland for breaking out of prison eight times. "Gone looking for Easter eggs," was a typically cheeky message he left behind for warders on one occasion.

French hamlet calmly awaits obliteration

CHAMBERY (AP) — A 1,500-tonne boulder sat poised Sunday to topple on to the hamlet of Saint-Jean in the French Alps... while residents evacuated from their homes below looked on. "We can't complain," said Danielle, 35, who was one of 76 residents hurriedly evacuated four days ago when the boulder's tilt accelerated dramatically. She said she and her family had been relocated into a comfortable, modern apartment in La Tania ski resort above the boulder. "My older daughter is delighted because she can go outside to ski," Danielle said. The massive rock has been closely monitored since a series of landslides in 1974. But when the average one millimetre a month tilt accelerated to 8.3 millimetres a day, the evacuation order was given.

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"In three weeks, it's over — no more wigs. It'll be great," Reichl exclaimed during a recent luncheon with AFP for which she had concealed her black curly hair under a blond wig and her face behind thick-framed fake glasses.

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